University of Alberta

Bodies of Evidence: Towards a Sexual Theology Accounting for Adolescent Females

by

Doris Marie Kieser ©

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Dedication

To the memories of three beautiful women of strength and faith who continue to inspire me towards flourishing:

My Grandmothers, Josephine Kieser and Blanche Prefontaine

and

Sr. Frances Nims, ibvm.

ABSTRACT

The historical evolution and contemporary manifestation of sexual theology within the Roman Catholic tradition is deficient of explicit consideration of the developmental aspects of human sexuality. In this thesis I address that deficiency by exploring contemporary sexual theology from within a feminist natural law perspective and constructing a sexual theology accounting for adolescent females. In so doing, I also conduct a meta-analysis of relevant existing empirical data pertaining to adolescent female sexuality (primarily psychological in nature) as a means of better understanding their sexual development, experiences, and interpretations. Finally, I undertake a synthesis of the discrete discourses of theology and developmental psychology in the construction of an adequate theological sexual ethic. The locus of this synthesis is the concept of human flourishing, sexual flourishing in particular, of persons in relationship with others and with the Divine. In the light of the above work, I conclude with a discussion of implications for Catholic sexuality education and curricula and some questions for further study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - WHAT'S A GIRL TO DO? 1

Setting the Stage: The Roman Catholic Theological Tradition In Contemporary Academic Discourse 4
  Why Feminist? Why Natural Law? 7

Roman Catholic Theological Values and Adolescent Females: Sex and Sexuality. 11
  Values and Virtues 11

How to Proceed: Methodological Questions and Limitations 16

How to Proceed: Substantive Outline 19

Who's That Girl? An Introduction 22

CHAPTER 2 - OF NATURAL LAW, FEMALES, AND SEX: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL TRADITION 26

Roman Catholic Theological Tradition: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality 28

Natural Law Theory and Theology 31
  Thomas Aquinas and Natural Law 31
  Contemporary Natural Law: The "Basic Goods Theory" 36
  Contemporary Natural Law: "Revisionism" 43

The Body, Eros, and Theology 50
  Erotic/Body Theologies 50
  Theology of the Body 54

Feminist Sexual Ethics: Of Bodies, Sex, and Gender 62
  Feminist Sexual Ethics: Theological Perspectives 63
  Feminist Theory: Sex, Gender, Subjectivity, Universality 67

Feminist Natural Law Theory 74
  Initial Voices 74
  Primary Voice: Cristina Traina and the End of Anathemas 77
  Traina and Feminist Moral Discourse 78
  Traina and the Catholic Ethical Tradition 79
  Traina: Feminist Ethics in Conversation with Natural Law 84
  Traina: Guidelines for a Feminist Natural Law Ethic 86

Summary 91

CHAPTER 3 - ADOLESCENT FEMALES IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT: SEX, GENDER, AND DEVELOPMENT 93

- Developmental Factors in Adolescence 96
  - Identity, Gender, and Gender Development Theory 98
    - Gender Development Theory 98
    - Hetero-normativity 105
    - Gender, Moral Development, and Voice 109
    - Who Am I? Self-Identity 112
  - Biological/Physical Development in Relation to Sex, Gender, and Socialization 115
    - Menarche 117
      - Affective Ambiguity and Experiential Ambivalence 121
      - Preparation, Secrecy, and Hiding. 123
      - Bodies and Sexuality 129
      - Messages and Discussion. 137
  - Neural Development in Adolescence 141

- Summary 151

CHAPTER 4 - THIS ONE'S FOR THE GIRLS: A SYNTHESIS OF DISCRETE DISCOURSES 153

- Full of Grace: Human Flourishing 153

- Girls and God: Adolescent Females and a Sexual Theology of Flourishing 160
  - Theoretical Framework Revisited 160
    - Theoretical Framework: Method 161
    - Theoretical Framework: Procedure 163
    - Theoretical Framework: Content 165

- Eagle When She Flies: Adolescent Females and Flourishing 168
  - Not a Girl, Not Yet A Woman: Acknowledging Developmental Realities and Female Bodies 168
    - Jack and Diane: Gender and Complementarity 168
    - Hips Don't Lie: Adolescent Female Bodies 173
    - These are a Few of My Favourite Things: Positive Construction of Adolescent Female Sexuality 177
      - Because You Loved Me: Parental Influences on Positive Adolescent Sexuality. 177
      - Anything You Can Do: Activities and Goals. 180
      - Like a Virgin: Norms, Values, and Beliefs. 182
    - What a Girl Wants: The Pleasure and Danger of Desire 188

- Oh. My. God. Towards a Theological Sexual Ethic for Adolescent Girls 203
  - An Acceptable Level of Ecstasy: Female Sexual Pleasure 203

Smells Like Teen Spirit: Adolescent Female Flourishing 210
Is There Something I Should Know? The Thickness of Flourishing 211
Calling All Angels: Sexual Theology and Adolescent Girls 214
Ambiguity: A Hazy Shade of God 214
What a Girl Needs: Pre-Requisites for Female Adolescent Sexual Flourishing.222
What's a Girl to Do? A Theological Sexual Ethic Accounting for Adolescent Girls 227

Brave New Girl: Summary 234

CHAPTER 5 - WHAT WAS I THINKING? 237

What Have I Done? 242
Step One: Natural Law and Sexual Theology 242
Step Two: Adolescent Females' Sexual Realities 243
Step Three: Synthesis and Construction 244

What Remains to be Done 246
Implications for Roman Catholic Sexuality Education 246
Human Sexuality Education: Four Roman Catholic Documents 248
Questions Arising 259
Curriculum and Sexuality Education 259
Adolescent Females and Sexuality 262
Sexual Theology 265

Is That All There Is? Concluding Remarks 268

REFERENCES 270

CHAPTER 1 - WHAT'S A GIRL TO DO?[1]

What *is* a girl to do? The moral questions facing Western adolescent females today, particularly those regarding sexual expression, are complex and engaging. The diverse cultural influences facing contemporary adolescent females intersect in the concrete lives of actual girls in the throes of teen spirit. *La Senza Girl,* Pope Benedict XVI, *Maxim*, Girl Guides, *FaceBook,* Oprah, and Mother Theresa[2] exist side-by-side in the melee of consumer and media messages about what it means to be an adolescent female. Running quietly parallel to these influences are parents, teachers, coaches, pastors, mentors, siblings, and friends. These more immediate personal influences on adolescent females are living the reality of adolescence alongside the girls, often drawing them hopefully towards a life of flourishing, integrity, safety, joy, and faith. While dollars are spent on constructing external beauty, hours are invested in fostering personal self-awareness, intelligence, emotional insight, physical capacity, relational maturity, and life-sustaining spirituality. The precarious balance of adolescent female flourishing is found precisely in the ambiguity arising from girls' engagement in their worlds.

In the thick and thin of both teaching undergraduate theology and providing psychological counseling to adolescent girls and women, few questions touch me more profoundly than those pertaining to gender, sex, sexuality, and sexual experience. Undergraduate students are generally keen to approach these questions and issues meaningfully in a safe environment. Conversely, adolescent girls, or at least the girls with whom I work, tend generally to be more hesitant to address anything sex-related, despite acknowledging the pervasive presence of sex in their lives (for better or for worse). These are two different groups of people, disparate audiences of the current Western spectacle of sex. It strikes me that messages about the meaning and significance of the person as sexual are fired buckshot into a crowd of differently-matured individuals and groups, with little distinction made for appropriateness and human flourishing.

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[1] In this introductory chapter I provide a cursory overview of my thesis. In-depth engagement with and analysis of relevant literature will proceed with substantially more rigour in following chapters.

[2] *La Senza Girl:* A clothing store focusing on selling undergarments to pre-teen girls - a branch of the adult female lingerie store *La Senza*; *Maxim:* A men's magazine, often featuring barely-clad starlets provocatively posed; *FaceBook:* An online social network by which people connect globally and often pseudonymously.

When reflecting on this perception, I realize that theologians, as much as anyone, are guilty of adopting wholesale the buckshot approach to sexual theology. We theologians have, over two millennia, constructed sexual theologies that assume adulthood in their audiences. This assumption is problematic when trying to engage adolescents in meaningful conversation about sexuality. Teens are often distant from the language and the context in which theology is developed and, therefore, sit on the margins of the conversation. Add to this distance the ongoing marginalization of religious and theological discourse from the public sphere and we theologians find ourselves dinosaurs in the evolution of adolescent sexuality and sexual ethics. For these reasons, I address both sexual theologies and empirical data (e.g., psychological, neurological, developmental) regarding adolescent females' realities and construct a theology that is useful, appropriate, and meaningful to them. My question is, "What facilitates adolescent female flourishing in the light of Christian faith?"

Although I will elaborate on the concept of human flourishing in more depth in the following chapters, I draw attention to it here as a central criterion for an appropriate sexual ethic for adolescent females (and others). I suggest that general human flourishing and adolescent female sexual flourishing are robust enough criteria to evaluate the virtues, values, and norms characterizing a theological sexual ethic. In particular, because adolescent females experience considerable sexual development, the facilitation of their sexual flourishing ought to be paramount in articulating what might be appropriate norms for them. Thus, what might *lead to* adult female sexual flourishing is as important a question as what actually *constitutes* adult female sexual flourishing.

I understand flourishing from within a Christian theological perspective, which assumes beatitude as the primary human *telos.* That is, persons flourish in right relationship with God, as is witnessed in their relationships with others, with self, and with creation. To facilitate flourishing in any realm (e.g., physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual) persons must ever attend not only to practical exigencies, but also spiritual exigencies. A theological articulation of sexual flourishing is thus always mindful of the person's relationship to the Divine. In the Christian tradition, this relationship is found in understanding Jesus Christ as the human incarnation of God, whose mediation in the world continues in and through the Holy Spirit. Human sexual flourishing is an embodiment of relationship with the Divine.

The important normative criterion of human flourishing also raises a practical question: how do humans flourish in our concrete, day-to-day lives? Numerous historical and contemporary theories address this question with a broad view: is flourishing best realized in attending to the particulars of each individual human life? Or is flourishing more adequately nurtured by attending to the general patterns of human well-being? These questions sit at the core of my study, for the foundations of ethical discussion shape its trajectory, methodology, process, and conclusions. My thesis is that human sexual flourishing is neither a wholly particular nor wholly universal reality. Rather, flourishing is best facilitated within an integrated synthesis of the universal and particular realities of human experience. Such a synthesis requires a robust theoretical foundation that is dynamic enough to move with the variability of people's actual lives but is also stalwart enough to support a shared ethic. I turn to the contemporary discourse that underscores my investigation into a theological sexual ethic appropriate to adolescent females.

Setting the Stage: The Roman Catholic Theological Tradition In Contemporary Academic Discourse

To conduct a meaningful exploration of adolescent female sexual flourishing within the context of theological discourse, some understanding is required of the current state of theoretical discourse regarding anthropology and morality. What is the contemporary climate in the discourse between Roman Catholic theology and feminist ethical theory? What impact does the state of this theoretical discourse have on the incorporation of empirical data into theological reflection? Why do I adopt feminist natural law as the basis for my exploration? To answer these questions and to situate my own work in the broader academic discourse, I sketch the landscape within which Roman Catholic theology and feminist theory meet.

Since the death of Pope John Paul II in April 2005, then Cardinal Ratzinger (and current Pope Benedict XVI) has spoken strongly against a "dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires" (Ratzinger, 2005). In numerous homilies and addresses since assuming the papacy (Benedict XVI, 2007, 2006a, 2006b), Pope Benedict has taken up the task begun by Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)* (1993) to warn against embracing the winds of change in the contemporary discussion of good and evil, right and wrong. He urges that there are indeed natural and sustained truths of both faith and humanity, upon which persons must build a human and theological morality.

These statements come in light of the rise of post-modernist and post-structuralist critiques of the "hegemony of the universal". Recognizing the methodological and procedural difficulties in having exclusive groups positing truths for all of humanity, independent of individual experiences, post-modern theorists counter with an assumption of difference among persons. This assumption leads to the difficult conclusion that in fact the human community may have nothing to say about normative morality. In such a climate, any ethical theory that posits universal truths about moral action (e.g., one based in natural law) is rejected as an hegemonic imposition of one culture upon another (or others).

Roman Catholic moral theological thought is then placed in the precarious position of accepting both the constructed and different realities of human experience and some ascription to sameness among humans as humans and, therefore, some normative morality. This is a consistent struggle of theologians through the ages. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)* (1965a) beautifully articulates the profound ambiguity of a faith and morality that lives "already now", but is "not yet". Over forty years ago, in the light of rapidly changing social realities on a global scale, the Church humbly acknowledged that the human community is "buffeted between hope and anxiety and pressing one another with questions about the present course of events"; we are "burdened down with uneasiness" (1965a, no. 4). We ask the perennial question, "What ought we to do?" Ethics and moral theology pertain to how we, humankind, live well together in creation, how we are to be loving, compassionate, and faithful to God, self, and others, while recognizing the profundity of our capacity to sin. Life is complex and morality is hard.

How do we, Christian people of God, legitimately enter the ethical and moral conversations taking place within the Academy, within our own cultures, and more globally among human communities? The papal statements condemning the "dictatorship of relativism" seem to indicate an impasse between the institutional Church and contemporary post-modernist and post-structuralist discourse, an impasse that threatens to render Catholic theological ethics and morality irrelevant in the broader world. Here enters feminist natural law theory.

Why Feminist? Why Natural Law?

In the current scholarly climate regarding discussions of sexuality, sex, and gender, one might well wonder about the place of a feminist natural law theory in contemporary discourse or traditional Catholic moral theology. There are deep tensions between the post-modern/post-structural and the traditional Roman Catholic schools of thought in exchanges pertaining to sex and gender. These schools of thought are laden with anthropological assumptions and concomitant ethical conclusions.

The crux of the discord within current discussions of sexuality, sex, and gender has to do with the perception of universals and essentials (indeed, of "nature" itself) in opposition to the perception of particulars and contingents (indeed, in the *lack* of "nature" itself). The general post-modern critique of the universalist construction of human nature is that it assumes too much commonality among persons. Because universalisms have historically been based on a decidedly hegemonic model of human relationships (e.g., sexisms), post-structuralists posit that the resulting oppression of "difference" among persons has been devastating in human history (e.g., for females). This critique extends into issues related to sex, sexuality, and gender. If, as post-structuralists posit, we alternatively assume individual difference, then we have no grounds upon which to base any form of oppression or hegemony; every normative and ethical stance is deserving of equal consideration among various human communities.

In contrast, the Roman Catholic theological and ethical tradition has always assumed an essential sameness among individual human persons: we are all born in the image and likeness of God, which binds us together in solidarity with and responsibility to one another. The strength of this position is its moral imperative to be responsible to and for one another, and to steward creation with love and compassion. Unfortunately, history has also shown the vulnerabilities of an argument for sameness: oppression, violence, and abuse have found their way into the Church's (and other institutions') response to a number of types of difference over the centuries, including sexuality and gender.

In the context of contemporary discourse about sex and gender, scholars move primarily between the "sameness" articulation of individual human sexuality and the "difference" articulation. The sameness proponents, in varying degrees, espouse a claim to universally normative human sexuality and sexual behaviour. In the official Roman Catholic formulation of this claim, gender and sex are conflated. Thus masculine and male, and feminine and female, are essentially connected and universally discernible. Acknowledgment of "difference" is encapsulated within the complementarity of the sexes.[3] Males and females, by their very nature, complete one another in the order of human relationships ordained by God.

Although complementarity of sex and gender are essential within official Roman Catholic teachings regarding human anthropology, they are not so within feminist theological formulations of sex and gender. Rather, most feminist theological positions are predicated upon the assumption that sex and gender are different human anthropological realities (Coll, 1994). Masculine and feminine are gender constructions particular to cultural realities, whereas male and female are biological sex realities inherent and meaningful in human experience.[4] This feminist articulation thus walks the middle ground between the sameness and difference schools of thought: the difference schools of thought (some contemporary feminist theory, for instance), is in polar opposition to the official Roman Catholic anthropological understanding of sameness.[5] Some feminist theorists, based heavily on the early, groundbreaking work of Judith Butler (1999/1990), posit the conflation of sex and gender not in any universal or essential manner, but rather as discursive social constructions that in turn lead to the perfomativity of one's sexual, gendered being in society. What it means to be masculine/male or feminine/female thus has everything to do with one's concrete context. In and of itself, biological sex has no meaning.

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[3] For example, see Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae (On Human Life)*, 1968; John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, 1995a, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (On Sacred Ordination)*, 1994, *Mulieris Dignitatem (On the Dignity of Women)*, 1988; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, 2004.

[4] For example: Cahill, 1997, 1996; Coakley, 2002; Farley, 2006; and Gudorf, 1994.

[5] Note their differences regarding the use of the term "gender" in the United Nations Statement following the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women. Feminist/Queer theorist Judith Butler outlines these differences in her essay "The End of Sexual Difference?" (2004c).

Current feminist theological ethics engages, in multiple different ways, both traditional Roman Catholic theological method and post-modern, post-structural feminist theory.[6] In an attempt to recognize sameness *and* difference, to walk the ambiguous path between universals *and* particulars, some feminist theologians are positing a feminist reformulation of Roman Catholic natural law theory that methodologically and procedurally accommodates for difference and sameness. Such a natural law theory is able substantively to attend to females' individual and collective experiences. The most comprehensive articulation of a feminist natural law theory to date is Cristina Traina's *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of Anathemas* (1999). Traina's feminist natural law serves as the foundation for my own construction of a theological sexual ethics robust enough to engage both the universal and the particular of adolescent females' sexual lives. I will address Traina's (and others theologians') work in more depth in Chapter Two.

As a feminist Roman Catholic theologian, I find myself drawn both to some normative account of human nature and experience (a sense of sameness) and to the recognition of concrete differences among individual persons (a sense of difference). This tension is especially true when I consider adolescent female sexuality. While I am eager to address individual experiences of sexuality as they are captured in empirical data, I also hope to identify some normative understanding of what facilitates adolescent female general and sexual flourishing. Adolescents are in the precarious between-time of growth from childhood into adult sexuality. They are sexually aware but do not yet possess the sagacity fully to integrate their sexuality. Experience tells us that developing adolescents require the guidance of adult wisdom, born of experience, successfully to integrate their burgeoning sexuality. Wisdom, however, is hard won: we theologians must attend to adolescent realities in our consideration of values, virtues, and norms. Only then are we able to discern what facilitates adolescent female sexual flourishing.

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[6] For example, see Lisa Cahill (1996) versus Rebecca Chopp (1991).

Roman Catholic Theological Values and Adolescent Females: Sex and Sexuality

Values and Virtues

At the outset, I clearly affirm the enduring worthiness of the values and virtues that inform and shape the Roman Catholic tradition regarding sex, sexuality, and sexual expression. For instance, the virtue of *chastity,* defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995) as "the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man [sic] in his bodily and spiritual being" (no. 2337), reflects centuries-long wisdom of the need for human persons not to be driven solely by their sexual desires. *Self-mastery* and *temperance* as the virtuous means to embody sexual self-respect and dignity are indeed both practical and ideological goods serving the long-term well-being of the whole person in relationship with God, others, and self. For the Church to understand human sexuality as both a gift and a responsibility is to recognize the profound ambivalence between the goodness of the sexual body and our capacity for sin (e.g., *Catechism*, nos. 2331-2400).

The values that inform relational morality in the Roman Catholic historical tradition also inform the contemporary Christian experience. Our theological understanding of intimate relationship takes as its model the Christian covenant with God in the incarnate Jesus Christ. Christians are called to fidelity, mutuality, respect, honour, commitment, responsibility, maturity, and gift of self to another in the wholeness of human loving relationships. These lofty goals are met through attention to the Holy Spirit and our empowerment to fidelity by relationship with Christ. The values and virtues essential to the Roman Catholic moral theological tradition embody respect for human sexuality beyond just its reproductive utility or random satisfaction of desire. The appropriate expression of sexual intimacy requires a loving, committed bond mature enough to withstand the vagaries of human emotion, intellect, and decision-making.

These values and virtues remain steadfast in my consideration of sexual theology and adolescent girls' sexualities. What is less satisfactory about the Roman Catholic moral theological tradition regarding sexuality, however, is its movement from virtues and values to moral norms (i.e., what ought or ought not to be done in any given situation). A feminist natural law formulation within my study allows for a broad consideration of adolescent female realities in order to move from values to norms. While other natural law formulations also attempt to provide a systematic application of values to the creation of substantive normative theological content (as I explore in Chapter Two), their lack of procedural attention to a variety of human experiences in the formulation of norms leaves their content limited and insufficient for excluded groups (e.g., adolescent females). The content of both the official moral teachings of the Church and other methodologically and procedurally limited accounts of natural law are thus inadequate.

The methodological leap from values and virtues to normative moral prescriptions in traditional (and official) moral theologies circumvents procedural attention to groups historically excluded in the theological enterprise. This methodological leap also seems based on a static reading of natural law theory that does not adequately reflect a method, procedure, and content inclusive of females' sexual realities. Voices of adolescent females are thus absent from the formulation of normative content of Roman Catholic theology because the official norms rest on data exclusive of their realities. The result is a sexual theology that is inattentive to (and perhaps inappropriate, inadequate, or irrelevant in) the real sexual experiences of all females and, particularly, adolescent females. The content deriving from these inadequacies thus suffers diminished moral authority among adolescent females (and others) and might actually jeopardize their capacity to flourish sexually and as whole persons.

As I note in coming chapters, although the values so deeply ensconced in the Roman Catholic tradition remain entrenched in sexual theological discussion, their interpretations among adolescents do not seem reflected in academic theological discourse. It is by no means understood, for instance, that the official articulation of *chastity* found in the *Catechism* (1995) is universally adopted among adolescents. Further, there is little theological discussion of the factors that affect, facilitate, or impede the adoption of these values and the development of these virtues among adolescents *in their actual contexts*. How might each person's engagement with his/her own circumstances (e.g., social, personal, developmental, financial, familial, educational, relational, etc.) impact upon their recognition, interpretation, adoption, and manifestation of these values and virtues in his/her own life?

Although empirical data are not the final arbiter of morality and what constitutes a moral life, they are a measure of human flourishing in relationship with others and with God. Attention to empirical data, particularly as regards the sexual realities of adolescent females, is lacking in theological discourse regarding sexual morality. Because such data record the stuff of human life - the daily negotiation of sin and grace - they also record the human attempt to discern the patterns of God's presence in our world. Moral decisions are made in the ebb and flow of everyday experiences. Theological attention to adolescent life in its messy reality will in turn contribute to the formation of capable moral decision-makers; the faithful will see themselves in theology and here they might find flourishing.

The need for self-recognition among the faithful in theological discourse recalls the contemporary theoretical discussions of sameness and universality, and difference and particularity. If indeed the theological tradition is to reflect revelation in human history, then it is necessary to include concrete human experience in our account of ongoing Christian revelation. Yet, it is not sufficient to dismiss the universal values that have been consistently iterated throughout Christian history. It seems reasonable to assume that revelation is neither strictly particular nor strictly universal. The theological task at hand is to discern how best to attend to sameness and difference, and the universal and the particular, regarding sexual theology and adolescent females.

Asking questions about theological sexual ethics and adolescent females invites consideration of sexuality education within Roman Catholic contexts. If our theological explorations yield new interpretations of values and virtues, and new articulations of normative content, then such shifts ought to be reflected substantively in Roman Catholic sexuality education. I therefore address sexuality education in the final chapter of this thesis, based upon my own exploration. What does sexuality education look like in Roman Catholic contexts today? What aspects of Roman Catholic sexuality education are positively reinforced by attention to empirical data? What shifts might consideration of data specific to adolescent females' sexual realities yield? What models of sexuality education curricula are best able to facilitate adolescent (and life-long) sexual flourishing? What factors affect the success of sexuality education among adolescents? What might educators do to increase the effectiveness of our efforts to facilitate sexual flourishing? With attention to method, procedure, and substance of sexual theology, I hope to add to the curricular discussion regarding Roman Catholic sexuality education.

How to Proceed: Methodological Questions and Limitations

Along with scripture, tradition, and philosophy, human experience is a foundational source of theological reflection and subsequent articulation within the Christian tradition (Cahill, 1994). As I have noted above, attention to the actual experiences of adolescent females in the articulation of sexual moral theology is lacking in Christian thought. My intention in this dissertation is to address the dearth of such attention with explicit consideration of empirical data regarding adolescent females' realities. Because such an exploration has not previously been undertaken in theological discourse, it seems prudent to confine my study to a survey of current relevant data. In this dissertation I conduct a meta-analysis[7] of existing theoretical and empirical data and literature regarding adolescent females' developmental and sexual realities (i.e., experiences, perceptions, influences). Further, I incorporate that data into a feminist natural law construction of a sexual ethic appropriate to adolescent females. I have chosen this methodological route to initiate a conversation between disciplines (i.e., developmental psychology and theology) that have previously remained discrete.

My particular theological interest is to address areas of lack in existing formulations of sexual theologies. Adolescent females and their experiences are unaccounted for in the Roman Catholic sexual theological tradition; their voices are silent. The lack, in this case, is theory, empirical data, and experience particular to the sexual realities of adolescent females. Hence these data are a focus of my study. In effect, I must omit consideration of other equally relevant sources of theology. One such omission is direct exegetical and hermeneutical consideration of Scripture. To explore scriptural accounts of sex, sexuality, and sexual expression is indeed a worthy undertaking. However, to do justice to such an undertaking would be excessive to this project. Simply to apply an eisegetical, proof-texting method of scripture study to the questions at hand would yield equally inadequate biblical scholarship. To undertake a more scholarly exegetical and hermeneutical reading of scripture, however, could easily be a dissertation in itself. In the Roman Catholic tradition, theological formulation relies on scripture as the breakthrough revelation of God in the world that is ongoing and, at times, surprising. In this light, I limit my revelatory data to a fairly specific moment in the human experience rather than apply scriptural revelation directly.

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[7] For my theological investigation, meta-analysis of the literature refers to a secondary analysis of existing empirical studies for the purposes of elucidation, in contrast to an independent field study of human subjects.

An equally obvious omission from this dissertation is explicit consideration of adolescent males' experiences and interpretations of sex and sexuality. This omission is problematic in the sense that adolescent females' experiences are tied to their relationships with males. Whatever conclusions I draw regarding sex, sexuality, gender, and sexual experience within adolescent females' lives and whatever concomitant theological formulations I propose, I am mindful that adolescent males' lives are practically, theoretically, and experientially present in the data I consider. Like the limitations that bind my attention to scripture, however, the limitations of space require that I leave the consideration of males' realities to another dissertation.

Such limitation by no means dismisses the concerns that might arise from a study of adolescent boys' lives and sexualities. On the contrary, this limitation recognizes the worthiness and complexity of such a project and the consideration it is due. I could not do such work justice in this particular endeavour.

Another limitation of this study reflects the theoretical questions arising from the consideration of sameness and difference. The empirical data with which I engage in this project primarily reflects adolescent girls in North America in particular, but also Western culture in general. Clearly, Western and North American adolescent females' experiences and interpretations of sex, sexuality, and sexual expression are not uniform. Indeed, they can be quite disparate and singular. Some factors that differentiate among adolescent females include their socio-economic backgrounds, cultural and racial backgrounds, geographical locations, countries of origin and heritage, gender and sex orientations, birth order, and education, among many. It would be inaccurate to suggest that the differentiation of demographic groups, for instance, among Caucasian, African-American/-Canadian, Native, or Hispanic could adequately capture the nuances of all adolescent females' lived experiences. However, it would be equally inaccurate to suggest that the data do not capture any significant evidence of similarity. Although empirical data, whether qualitatively or quantitatively collected, are necessarily limited, they do provide some insight into the lives of Western, North American adolescent females. In Chapters Three and Four, as much as possible, I draw distinctions of difference among the girls as they are captured in the data.

One final limitation of this project is its overall scope and depth. Because I am considering different disciplines in an effort to incorporate empirical data into theological discourse, my consideration of each discipline is focused on points of depth within the discipline rather than a breadth of information. I regret that some explorations are limited to specific points at hand rather than a breadth of discourse within the entire discipline. This is a function of doing work across disciplines. My intellectual inclination on many occasions is to dive more deeply into theories, empirical data, and their applications, but my practical inclination is to finish this dissertation before I die. I reluctantly succumb to my practical inclination and am left to hope that I sufficiently elucidate the issues at hand and substantiate my conclusions.

How to Proceed: Substantive Outline

To accomplish the task of constructing a sexual theology appropriate to adolescent females, I propose explicitly to consider the data of their lives: their experiences and perceptions of sex and sexuality. Following is a skeletal outline of the steps that I take in meeting that task.

First, in Chapter Two I delve into the Roman Catholic theological tradition and a number of formulations of natural law theory. Although the tradition is long and thick with accounts of natural law, I focus on Thomas Aquinas' definitive scholastic articulation of the theory in his *Summa Theologica.* (1947). Aquinas' natural law theory has endured throughout the evolution of Christian theology, particularly within the Roman Catholic tradition, and serves as a starting point for all other ensuing formulations. Following an account of Aquinas' natural law, I move to its more contemporary formulations and the current state of the question both in theological discourse and in broader academic discourse. Ultimately, I settle on a feminist natural law theory, articulated by Cristina Traina, as my own theoretical construct for considering adolescent females' realities in the formulation of sexual theology. Within Chapter Two I also complete an overview of contemporary Christian feminist sexual theologies to provide insight into the lack of consideration of females in general, and adolescent females in particular, in the Christian theological tradition.

The second step in this project is to explore developmental theories and empirical data pertaining to adolescent females' sexualities and sexual experiences. In Chapter Three I consider multiple factors that influence and are relevant to sexual development. In this chapter I focus extensively on the female pubertal experience of menarche and subsequent experiences of menstruation. This one moment (i.e., first menstruation) in a female's life constitutes her experiential introduction to her own reproductive capacity and the visible manifestation of female sexuality. There exists extensive empirical evidence to suggest that Western social perceptions of menarche and menstruation serve to colour females' experiences and perceptions of their own sexual bodies. In Chapter Three, my consideration of menarche and menstruation provide the central reality and metaphor for the place of female sexuality and sexual experience in Western culture and in the Roman Catholic theological tradition.

The synthesis of data pertaining to adolescent females and the Christian, Roman Catholic theological tradition is the crucial focus of this dissertation. In Chapter Four I construct a sexual theology appropriate to adolescent females' flourishing, based upon a feminist natural law formulation. I attend to methodological, procedural, and substantive questions that inform the sexual theological enterprise. Cristina Traina's feminist natural law theory (outlined in Chapter Two) is open to the integration of discrete discourses and theoretical constructs. Thus both developmental psychology and theology are accommodated in the normative content that I propose for a sexual theology accounting for adolescent females. In this chapter I acknowledge the moral ambiguity that accompanies the Christian experience of sin and grace. In the light of this moral ambiguity I propose both pre-requisites for a sexual theology that adequately addresses adolescent females' sexualities and the normative content of such a theology.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter Five) I address the implications for Roman Catholic sexuality education of a sexual theology inclusive of adolescent females' realities. I ask questions of existing curricula and official Church moral teaching regarding sex, sexuality and sexual expression. I also outline future directions for investigations that might enhance our understanding of sex, sexuality, adolescents, and Roman Catholic sexual theology. In the final chapter I also address the impact this undertaking has on me. A project such as this dissertation has the potential to hit close to the bone of its author. My personal investment in this highly-charged topic requires elucidation and flesh and blood to cover its skeleton. In this light, I believe an introduction to me might facilitate an understanding of my work to come. As do all scholars, I come to this project filled with my own life, which has strongly shaped my commitments to the lives represented in the data I consider. To understand my life and commitments more clearly, I offer the following insights.

Who's That Girl? An Introduction

I am feminist - the kind of feminist who is invested in the flourishing of females, children, and other vulnerable individuals and groups in society. I like males. I like females. I like children and teens, although I have none of my own. I am committed to a feminist stance within Roman Catholic, Christian communities and within my psychological counseling practice. I yearn for mutual justice and love in human relationships. I revel in hope for the reign of God. I advocate for females. I am curious about the inherent entanglements among sex, sexuality, and God. I believe that we find the Divine first and foremost in the faces of creation. I am grateful for others' generosity of time and spirit in my times of abundance and need. I love God. I find solace in Mary. I think Jesus likes a good laugh.

All of what I am converges in my fierce love of girls and women in the world. This convergence fuels the academic and counseling work I do. I would not have come to this enterprise without having reflected on my own faith and spirituality, for that reflection initially brought me to Christian theology. Neither would I have come to this enterprise without having reflected on my own general and sexual flourishing in the world, for that reflection eventually brought me to psychological counseling.

My family, friends, education, social upbringing, employment, and relationships all play an undeniable role in my life. I am fortunate to have parents and family who love me enough to instill in me strength of character, fortitude, patience for the long view of justice, and reliance on the Holy Spirit for guidance. My education has nurtured my capacity to question well, particularly those queries many people were unwilling to address with me.[8] My friends have shown me comfort and joy in moments of despair, and ongoing encouragement of my ceaseless academic inquiries. I have learned by volunteering that community is the locus of justice and work for human well-being. My work (both paid and unpaid) has variously nurtured my growth and expanded my humility. I have learned more about people from being with them than by reading and teaching about them. My personal and professional relationships have graced me with a deepening capacity for compassion, forgiveness, and mutual desire to experience God's love for another. Each person in my life has shown me, for better or for worse, some of myself and some of God. When I attend to adolescent girls, sexuality, theology, and God, therefore, I do so in context. I bring my entire relational, female self into what is, for me, a work of love.

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[8] I have read more about sex and sexuality than I once imagined possible. My formal education has taught me how and where to find answers that I seek for somewhat sticky questions. At the age of eleven I was reading books about reproduction, dating, and sex, because no adults seemed to want to talk about it and none of peers knew any more than I did. I learned quickly the value of a library card; I happily concede that I remain a library geek.

Necessarily, my collective life experience informs my work and introduces biases: To which data do I attend? Which points are most important to consider? How do I interpret existing thought on the various issues I present? I acknowledge the presence of such biases and limitations as testament to the tension of the Christian experience found between what we already now know from the revelation of God, and what is yet to be revealed. I recognize that I could be mistaken on some points, that I could be interpreting the already now reality of human experience as the not yet hope for beatitude. Such is the nature of the theological enterprise. God among us in the person of Jesus Christ invited us to a radical new relationship with the Divine. In and through the Holy Spirit, we are called to speak bravely to the meaning of God's presence among us, to trust in the movement of the Spirit in our lives, and to open ourselves, through prayer, to the will of God. I am already now in relationship with the Divine but I am not yet fully so.

This thesis is the result of my work in different worlds that, although appearing vastly disparate from a distance, are actually quite fruitfully connected. The tensions inherent in doing work among disciplines open a space for creative dialogue. In the following chapters I explore the tensions among sexuality, gender, adolescence, development, and theology as a means of considering human sexual flourishing. The connections that I experience in my different worlds are the connections that I hope to expand upon creatively in this work. To whatever extent this exploration is indeed fruitful, I am grateful for having the opportunity to embark on such a monumental journey.

CHAPTER 2 - OF NATURAL LAW, FEMALES, AND SEX: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

The colourful milieu of ambivalent and conflicting cultural messages about ourselves as human persons in the world defines our contemporary context. In North America, and likely a good deal of the rest of the world, we are inundated daily with images and information showing us what we need, inviting us continually to buy, and telling us how to live. Amidst the babel of consumerism, consumption, and the perfect body that colours Western culture resides the Roman Catholic Church, whose moral message is articulated in numerous voices: the official magisterial voice, the pastoral voices, and the theological voices. Of particularly pressing concern for the official Church are issues pertaining to life and its generation; the value of human life and our means of procreation (or contraception) have been front and centre in a good deal of Roman Catholic moral teaching in the past fifty years. In concert with the voice of the Magisterium (the official teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church) are the voices of pastors and theologians representing a variety of positions.

The voices most obviously advocating for women in the Church and in the world are those of feminist theologians.[1] From differing contexts, perspectives, traditions, and experiences, feminist theologians are asking questions about how females live a moral life in contemporary social realities. In the past fifty years, feminist theology has stood in stark contrast to the Church. These contrasts have not always been over conclusions drawn (while often disputing the conclusions of official teachings, still there are times when feminist conclusions dovetail with magisterial teachings, e.g., some feminist interpretations of new reproductive technologies), but rather more frequently over the methodology of the theological enterprise (feminist thinkers and the Magisterium generally take very different routes to reach their conclusions). In the context of shifting worldviews and theological methods sit the questions pertaining to bodies, gender, sex, and sexuality.

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[1] One classic example of feminist theology that has had an enduring impact on the Christian theological tradition is Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1990), originally published in 1983. Schussler Fiorenza, a biblical scholar, mined Scripture for texts and stories about women's role in early Christian history. This book launched a feminist revisioning of traditional translations and interpretations of the texts within a hermeneutic of suspicion. Other influential Christian feminist scholars include Rosemary Radford Ruether, Phyllis Trible, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Margaret Farley, Cristina Traina, early Mary Daly, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Pui-lan Kwok, Tina Beattie, and Sarah Coakley (see bibliography for references to their work).

In this chapter, I explore the Roman Catholic theological tradition in terms of both method and substance. My initial discussion provides an overview of the abiding natural law tradition, which has seen numerous formulations over the years. Following this exploration, I address more explicitly the contemporary scholarly context in which Roman Catholic theology exists, in particular theological and other theoretical discourse on the body, gender, sex, and sexuality. Finally, I present a formulation of a feminist natural law theory that grounds my exploration of the intersection between existing theoretical and empirical (primarily psychological) data regarding adolescence and adolescent females and sexual theology. I propose that a feminist natural law theory is capable of addressing the moral complexity of the world in which we live - the joys and hopes, the sorrows and despairs of a very plural human community. More pointedly, its elegant formulation provides space for the voices of females to enter the contemporary moral theological conversation.

Roman Catholic Theological Tradition: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

The Roman Catholic theological tradition has long expressed an awkward distrust of females. In her collection from documents about women by early Church fathers, Clark (1983) makes clear the fathers' profound ambivalence towards women: they "praised and blamed, honored and disparaged the female sex" (p. 15). This ambivalence stems largely from the construction of anthropological dualisms in the evolution of Christian theology, whereby aspects of the human experience were split into opposing pairs. Each aspect of the pair was judged more positively or more negatively. Further, each aspect was attributed either a male/masculine character (more positive) or a female/feminine character (more negative). Some traditional dualisms included soul/body, spiritual/material, and Christ/Church (e.g., Augustine, 1955 & 1952; Chrysostom, 1986). The former aspect of each pair was considered more male and the latter more female (Coll, 1994). The recognition of these dualisms has launched a plethora of debate in theoretical and practical circles alike.[2]

In particular, feminist theologians have taken up the task of addressing and redressing oppressive realities faced by females within (and without) the Christian tradition. Recognizing the denigration of women in the perpetuation of dualisms in the history of theology, feminist theologians have deconstructed the dualisms as a means of shifting the negative perceptions of females apparent in Christian theology. There are numerous classic feminist theological critiques of the Church's historical and contemporary teachings on and subsequent treatment of women. These works engage biblical, historical, and contemporary texts central to Christian theology (e.g., Daly, 1968 & 1973; Ruether, 1983; Schneiders, 1991; Schussler Fiorenza, 1990/1983). Clearly the experiences of women, so long omitted from Christian theological discussion, are now required consideration in the theological enterprise; it is also clear that these experiences challenge the historical dualistic thinking so embedded in the theological tradition. To uncover the negative biases against females inherent in the historical dualisms is to uncover the anthropological underpinnings of a patriarchal and sexist theology.

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[2] A parallel term for "dualisms" in feminist theoretical discussions is "binaries".

Rather than undertaking an extensive historical overview of the manifestation of dualisms within official and other Roman Catholic theology, I propose instead to attend to more contemporary manifestations of sex, gender, and sexuality within the Roman Catholic tradition. I suggest that the official teachings persist in the promulgation of dualisms, in the assumption of complementarity of the sexes (and genders), power differentials, hetero-normativity, and male sexuality. I further suggest that this promulgation relies upon a static reading of the theory of natural law that is unable to account adequately for women's experiences.

Beginning with Pope Paul VI's watershed document *Humanae Vitae* (1968), subsequent works by Pope John Paul II (both official, e.g., *Evangelium Vitae,* 1995a, and unofficial, *The Theology of the Body,* 1997), and various other official documents (e.g., *Donum Vitae,* 1987, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF]), there remains a dualistic assumption that extends into the roles and meaning of both sex and gender. Further, this assumption is operative in the expansion of the theological anthropology into sexual ethics and theology. Thus, normative behaviour is predicated upon what is considered natural to each of the sexes by virtue of their complementary natures.

Such a formulation is open to critique on a number of levels. A first critique is of the lack of attention to women's actual experiences, which thereby allows for an inadequate formulation of women's nature and sexuality. A second critique is of the negative assessment of both females and sexuality based upon the assumption of anthropological dualisms within the teachings (e.g., Cahill, 1985 & 1996; Gudorf, 1994). A final critique is of the positing in itself of an essential understanding of nature (and natures) that would universalize human realities across place, time, and circumstance. This critique pertains to the official formulation of natural law (Traina, 1999). Within each of these critiques there is not only a focus on the content of the teachings, in particular as they pertain to women, but also a focus on the method and procedure from which the content is derived. In that light, I turn now to examine the theological tradition within which these critiques sit.

Natural Law Theory and Theology

Contemporary sexual theologies arise from an abiding and dynamic development of natural law theory within the Roman Catholic theological tradition. Natural law theory finds its most sturdy roots in the work of medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) (1947 translation). Aquinas' benchmark formulation of natural law is situated within the First Part of the Second Part of his extensive *Summa Theologica.*[3] Here Aquinas formulates natural law in the broader context of law in general.

Thomas Aquinas and Natural Law

For Aquinas, law is "nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated" (I-II, Q.90, a.4). He further qualifies law as eternal/divine law, natural law, or human law. Most importantly for Aquinas, eternal law is that law which is Divine Reason's governance of all things in the universe. Since Divine Reason is not subject to time, the law thereby promulgated must of necessity be eternal (I-II, Q. 91, a. 1). Aquinas would further posit that the natural law is the rational creature's (human's) participation of eternal or divine law (I-II, Q.91, a.2). The following quotation maps the trajectory of Aquinas' thought:

> Since all things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law... it is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine

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[3] Aquinas wrote the *Summa* during the years 1267 – 1273, although he never actually completed the work. Throughout this paper I refer to the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Friars (1947), as cited in the reference list.

> providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.
>
> … The light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light. It is therefore evident that the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law (I-II, Q. 91, a. 2).

For Aquinas it would appear as though there is no formulation of the reasonable apprehension of natural law by human persons discrete from recognition of eternal law. Aquinas' worldview regarding the relationship between faith and reason is such that eternal law and natural law are inseparable: one cannot posit a natural law without reference to its perfection in eternal law. This formulation is based on his understanding of union with God as the natural human *telos*. Central to Aquinas' natural law is his understanding that God is the ultimate end towards which human persons strive. As Porter (1999) and Hittinger (1997) point out, therefore, Aquinas' is not a strictly philosophical formulation, but rather a theological one.

While for Aquinas the theological and philosophical conflation regarding the law is a natural one, later formulations of the natural law will posit its strictly philosophical character as a means of appealing to a broadly human (rather than Christian) basis for ethical discussion. I suggest such a formulation meets with mixed results. Because Thomas sees beatitude as the *telos* of human persons, natural law is therefore oriented towards this end. Further, the lived experience of the human person is of necessity directed towards God, towards whom we are inclined. Thomas formulates all goods within the broader understanding of this human *telos*, thus the goods are not for themselves, but means for the attainment of beatitude. To separate the natural from the eternal law in order to formulate a strictly philosophical natural law would then situate the goods themselves as the human *telos*.

Regarding moral action in particular, Aquinas understands the first precept of the natural law to be "'good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.' All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this" (I-II, Q. 94, a.2). Beyond the first precept, Aquinas indicates only three further precepts of the natural law as they flow from the first precept: 1) the preservation of one's own being and the avoidance of its obstacles; 2) the inclination of humans in matters as pertain to all animals, "such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth"; and 3) the inclination to know the truth about God (I-II, A.94, a.2). Interestingly, Aquinas goes no further in his formulation of the precepts of natural law. This paucity of detail regarding specific precepts has been the source of a great deal of scholarly discussion over the years. Hittinger (1997) suggests that Aquinas was not inclined to apply the natural law as a means of solving moral questions, but rather as a means by which to formulate and address the questions.

For Aquinas, the means by which we attain the goods and move towards God are the virtues. Thus he locates his discussion of natural law within the broader discussion of habits, virtues, and vices (See I-II, QQ. 49-114). Here sits his discussion of practical moral reasoning. That is, we do not achieve the goods by rote application of precepts and norms, but by the human capacity to reflect in practical wisdom on the situation at hand, given what we know to be true. Chief among all human capacities in practical moral reasoning is the virtue of prudence: "Prudence is an intellectual virtue with a practical purpose: it tells us what pertains to the accomplishment of ends"…"by installing flexible, multivalent, but rigorous reasoning at the center of practical moral reflection" (Traina, 1999, p. 65). For Aquinas, the expectation is that each person will, to varying degrees, be capable of prudent moral reflection in his/her own particular circumstance. He is willing to allow for the uncertainty that might arise from such an open interpretation of inclinations towards the Divine, while clearly understanding that not all moral choices are equally legitimate.

Compounding the ambiguity ensuing his lack of detail is Aquinas' recognition of the potential for error in the application of practical reason. The following lengthy quotation summarizes his position nicely:

> To the natural law belong those things to which a man is inclined naturally: and among these it is proper to man to be inclined to act according to reason. Now the process of reason is from the common to the proper, as stated in Phys. i. The speculative reason, however, is differently situated in the matter from the practical reason. For, since the speculative reason is busied chiefly with the necessary things, which cannot be otherwise than they are, its proper conclusions, like the universal principles, contain the truth without fail. The practical reason, on the other hand, is busied with contingent matters, about which human actions are concerned: and consequently, although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects. Accordingly then in speculative matters truth is the same in all men, both as to principles and as to conclusions: although the truth is not known to all as regards the conclusions, but only as regards the principles which are called common notions. But in matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is

> not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles: and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all. (I-II, Q. 94, a.4)

Aquinas here seems to be making room for three significant realities in his development of natural law. The first reality is that the natural law pertains not only to "nature" but also to "reason". That is, what occurs as "natural" is not the determiner of morality, without reasonable (i.e., prudent, just, and charitable) reflection on its place in each circumstance. For Aquinas, what "is", is not necessarily what "ought" to be. The second reality is historicity.[4] In recognizing that the more detailed the circumstance, the more likelihood of error in practical reasoning, Aquinas acknowledges the need for prudence in declaring absolutes, lest we declare necessary that which is circumstantial. In so cautioning for prudence in practical reason, historical situational circumstance becomes for Aquinas a factor in moral judgement.

The third reality Aquinas acknowledges is that there are differences in the human capacity for practical reason and moral judgement. For various reasons, upon which he does not elaborate here (e.g., maturity, intelligence, information), people will know more or less, and thus be more or less prudent in moral decision-making. As

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[4] Traina makes the following points regarding Aquinas' understanding of historicity: "Although Thomas clearly allows in theory for variation and change in practical moral conclusions, he just as clearly does not expect that the amplitude of their oscillations will be very large. Although his own culture was hardly ossified or ignorant of other societies – and his own theology was initially intellectually disruptive rather than pacific – his ideal was relative homogeneity. Making peace with the panoply of functioning sets of norms coexisting in the contemporary dynamic, plural global culture was a task he certainly did not envision. Nor did he anticipate the historicism that makes casuistry continuously necessary." And: "The bounds and conclusions of Thomas's own use of prudence... are thus very narrow. But because they leave small openings for innovation, they do not permanently mark the limits of prudence's range. And the wider the variation one admits in time and circumstances, the 'more the great commandments of love of God and of neighbor, the great principles of justice and charity' – rather than any specific set of concrete precepts – appear as the primary criteria of natural law's conclusions." (Both citations: Traina, 1999, p. 69)

Hittinger (1997) points out, "As for his estimation of the efficacy of natural law in the human mind, Thomas never wavered from the judgment that only the rudiments (or the *seminalia,* the seeds) are known by the untutored mind" (p. 7). Thomas understands that practical moral reason takes time, diligence, and maturity, and the point of the moral life is to become a person who pursues good ends "wisely and habitually" (Traina, 1999, p. 77).

> In short, the moral life, in both its natural and its supernatural dimensions, is a process of maturation in virtue requiring diligence and practice. This fact warns us to keep on our toes. But it also forbids us to expect all the acts of the virtues even from a person who has their infused habits and so invites conversation with contemporary theories of moral development that might help us chart and evaluate progress in moral virtue. (Traina, 1999, p. 78)

While this brief overview of Thomas Aquinas' formulation of natural law does not do justice to the nuance and complexity of his work, it does provide an introduction to consider more contemporary natural law formulations. Currently within the Roman Catholic theological tradition there exist a number of interpretations of natural law, most of which find their roots in Aquinas' work.[5]

Contemporary Natural Law: The "Basic Goods Theory"

In *What are they saying about Catholic ethical method?* (2003) Todd Salzman provides an overview of two schools of thought regarding contemporary natural law formulations.[6] He terms these the *Basic Goods Theory (BGT)* and *Revisionism.*[7] The primary proponents of the BGT are Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle, with strong concurrence from William E. May (e.g., Grisez, 1965; Grisez, Boyle, & Finnis, 1987; May, 2003 & 1998). This formulation holds that natural law is accessible by reason to all persons, without reference to the eternal law of God (that is, they lift the natural law out of Aquinas' *telos* of beatitude), and that Aquinas' formulation did not move sufficiently enough into the specific precepts of natural law to provide adequate guidance for moral action. Hence the Basic Goods theorists outline eight incommensurable goods (that is, goods that cannot be weighed against one another in moral decision-making, either in theory or in practice), common to all persons, which place moral requirements on our behaviours. With a particular emphasis on the biological reality of nature in their use of reason to determine the goods, they situate human *telos* not in God, but in the fulfillment of the basic goods. Here, the Basic Goods theorists differ from Aquinas.

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[5] Two notable contemporary scholarly formulations of natural law that will not be discussed here are Pamela Hall's (1994) *Narrative and the natural law: An interpretation of Thomistic ethics* and Russell Hittinger's (1987) *A critique of the new natural law theory.*

According to May (2003), these basic goods fall into categories of goods of human persons. In one category are three "substantive" basic goods. These goods are substantive in that they do not include choice in their fulfillment of aspects or dimensions of human persons (May, 2003, pp. 96-97). These three basic goods are 1) human life itself, including health, reproduction, and education; 2) knowledge of truth and beauty, in service of human intelligence; and 3) playful activity and development of skill, in participation in culture (p. 96). A second category of human goods is "reflexive" or "existential". These are reflexive goods "because they fulfill persons precisely insofar as they are able to make choices and are thus capable of moral good and evil" (p. 95). These four goods share *harmony* as their theme and they are as follows: 1) self-integration of feelings, choices, and judgements; 2) authentic expression of one's self-integration; 3) just and neighborly relationships with others; and 4) peace with God in pursuit of meaning and value (p. 95). The eighth and final good identified within the BGT is marriage. This more recent addition to the basic goods is considered both a reflexive good, because it includes "marital friendship and fidelity" and a substantive good, because its core is the "indissoluble one-flesh unity" and "it is open to the good of human life" (p. 96). Although the reflexive goods do require choice and place upon us moral imperatives, they do not themselves have moral value. May (2003) points out that because one can choose to participate in the basic goods in immoral ways, even though striving to fulfill them, they do not possess inherent moral value.

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[6] The position that there is a universally accessible moral understanding of human experience meets with some opposition in contemporary scholarship. This opposition will be addressed in more detail below.

[7] For a more detailed analysis of each position, see Salzman (2003).

Recognizing the lack of moral content in the articulation of the basic goods, the BG theorists further propose the First Principle of Morality (FPM). The function of the FPM is to provide a criterion to distinguish between morally good and morally bad choices in our pursuit of the basic goods. Specifically formulated, the FPM states:

> In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose and otherwise will those and only those possibilities whose willing is compatible with a will toward integral human fulfillment. (May, 2003, p. 100)

In this formulation, integral human fulfillment is that towards which practical reason strives, which is in contrast with Aquinas' *telos* towards beatitude. According to May, integral human fulfillment is "an ideal whose attractiveness depends on *all* the goods that can appeal to persons and serve as reasons for acting" (2003, p. 101; italics original). Persons are able reasonably to attend to basic human goods and direct their wills towards the fulfillment of those goods.

> The will of a person committed to choosing and acting in accord with the requirements of integral human fulfillment is the will of a person inwardly disposed to choose well, to choose in accord with unfettered or "right" reason. In short, it is the ideal community of all human persons richly fulfilled in all human goods, for whose realization a virtuous person wishes; this ideal guides such a person's choices in pursuing particular benefits for particular persons and communities. (May, 2003, p. 101)

To substantiate moral content further, the BGT introduces the Modes of Responsibility (MoR). The purpose of the MoR is to specify the FPM by excluding as immoral those actions that involve willing in ways that are incompatible with willing integral human fulfillment (May, 2003). These MoR include the entire range of real goods available to human persons and the requirements of prudence in its fullness. As a means of identifying the presence of character within an individual in accord with the MoR, one need only look for their corresponding virtues. Thus the eight Modes of Responsibility and their corresponding virtues follow: 1) one ought not to allow inertia to impede acting for intelligible goods (i.e., diligence); 2) one ought not to allow excessive emotion to lead one to act individualistically for an intelligible good (i.e., team spirit); 3) one ought not to act solely to satisfy an emotional desire apart from the pursuit of an intelligible good (i.e., self-control, discipline); 4) one ought not to act solely to satisfy an emotional aversion apart from the avoidance of an intelligible evil (i.e., courage); 5) one ought not to act in relation to other persons solely based upon an emotional response to them apart from the pursuit of an intelligible good or avoidance of an intelligible evil (i.e., fairness); 6) one ought not to allow emotions to cloud reflection on the empirical facts related to an intelligible good (or evil) (i.e., sincerity, clear-headedness); 7) one ought not to allow hostility to contribute to one's choice to allow for or cause the destruction or damage of an intelligible good (i.e., patience, forgiveness); and 8) one ought not to allow one's motivation towards one intelligible good to lead one to act to destroy or damage another intelligible good (i.e., reverence) (Adapted from May, 2003, pp. 104-105, 137).

The eight MoR and their corresponding virtues provide the BGT with a means of moving from the First Principle of Morality and the basic goods towards specific moral norms.

> The modes of responsibility… are normative principles more specific than the first principle of morality, but they are more general than specific moral norms identifying kinds of human choices as morally good or morally bad. Such specific norms are discovered by considering the ways a proposed human action relates a person's will to basic human goods and by considering such a proposed human action in light of the first principle of morality and its specifications. (May, 2003, p. 105)

In articulating the modes of responsibility and alluding to specific moral norms (which can be either absolute or non-absolute), the proponents of the Basic Goods Theory attempt to flesh out Aquinas' rather more sparse articulation of the content of natural law itself.

While this formulation of basic goods is helpful in understanding human tendencies, its application in the form of norms seems to move, for its content, into the realm of Catholic magisterial teaching. Indeed, May (2003) acknowledges that the recognition of "marriage" as the eighth basic good was "primarily because of the teaching of the Church's magisterium on marriage" (p. 96). This move belies the BG theorists' assertion that the natural law is of itself known by reason, and only enlightened by faith. One might surmise that "marriage" (as opposed to "partnering" or "mating"), as a basic good, could be more readily accepted as a matter of faith (in particular, Catholic) than as a matter of reason.

Also, their ascription of the natural law solely to the realm of reason, enlightened by faith, seems, according to Porter (1999), to be inconsistent with the scholastic formulation of natural law (Aquinas, 1947). Porter's interpretation of the scholastics on natural law is that they would see it as an inherently theological construct, tied necessarily to divine law. That is, they assume a relationship between the will of God and human moral action, insofar as we are naturally inclined to meet the goods as a means to union with God. Proponents of the basic goods theory posit the goods as reasonably ascertainable by all persons without an inherent connection to any faith-based construct. The difficulty with such a position is not whether the theory begins within an inherently theological construct, but rather whether, depending on one's starting point, the theory ends within a theological construct, that is, whether the content of the theory assumes revelation in its substance. If such an assumption is the case, the theory must abandon its premise of being based solely in right reason, only enlightened by faith. Further, the basic goods theorists' formulation of natural law shapes the ways in which norms and Modes of Responsibility are applied to moral decision-making. Unlike Aquinas, they leave little room for historical circumstances and the development of prudence in the human moral endeavour.

For Aquinas, the interconnection of the theological and the philosophical (i.e., faith and reason) is natural and understood. The conclusions he draws alluding to his specific faith perspective are therefore understandable and expected. Further, his theological assumptions provide the direction towards which our moral actions are inclined, that is, God. By contrast, in divorcing themselves from theology in their philosophical formulation of natural law, the BG theorists default any reliance on faith perspectives in their construction and conclusions regarding normative moral reflection and action. I suggest that the reason this divorce is unsuccessful within the BGT is that, by virtue of its very roots, natural law is a faith-infused philosophical construct. Thus Aquinas' rather sparse content of natural law itself provided space for faith and theology to be conversant with other perspectives and traditions regarding moral questions. Although the conclusions of faith are clearly included in moral reflection, they are also complemented by a great deal of data not generated theologically. In a Western post-modern era of difference, I suggest that a theory openly based upon a faith perspective is as valid as the next theory that is not. Thus, acknowledging a natural law tradition from within a specifically Catholic perspective ought not to hinder respectful discourse among other disciplines.

The articulations of the BG theorists are useful in their reflection on human tendencies; however, the deductive structure of the theory does not provide sufficient space (in contrast to Aquinas) to include the actual data of human experience in its formulation of natural law. Also, their suggestion of the incommensurability of the goods puts the theory in contrast with practice. If the goods cannot be measured within practical moral decision-making, we are left with rather narrow choices. (This is the very discussion the revisionists take up.) In their attempt to add content to the natural law to provide guidance (and perhaps moral surety?) to human moral reflection and action, the BG theorists deny its messy reality. Moral decision-making is difficult: the data change and the capacity to choose is variably developed among us. By denying the ambiguity of the human moral experience, the BGT sits aside from the concrete details of human life, which is, of course, where moral decisions take place.

Contemporary Natural Law: "Revisionism"

The second school of thought articulated by Salzman (2003) is the *Revisionist*[8], the primary proponents of which are Richard A. McCormick and Charles E. Curran. Both McCormick and Curran have engaged in systematic inquiries about moral decision-making and the structure of natural law, often in conversation with proponents of the BGT (e.g., Curran, 1991; McCormick, 1978). The Revisionist consideration of natural law rests more easily than the BGT with Aquinas' ambiguity regarding specific behaviours and moral norms. Curran reiterates that Aquinas himself perceived natural law as "a deliberative ethic which arrives at decisions not primarily by the application of laws, but by the deliberation of reason" and that "there is no such thing as *the* natural law as a monolithic philosophical system with an agreed upon body of ethical content existing from the beginning of time" (1991, pp. 253-254). Thus, the proponents of the Revisionist school of thought are concerned not so much with articulation of the *content* of natural law as they are concerned to address *method and system* with regard to the application of natural law in moral decision-making.

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[8] Also commonly referred to as the *Proportionalist* school of thought.

In a discussion of theological method and moral decision-making, Curran points out the emergence of an historically conscious worldview that understands the world as a dynamic reality. He further posits that an inductive moral theological method within such a worldview allows for ambiguous options and uncertain moral choices.

> A more historically conscious methodology does not pretend to have or even to aim at absolute certitude. Since time, history, and individual differences are important, they cannot be dismissed as mere accidents which do not affect essential truth. This approach does not emphasize abstract essences, but concrete phenomena. Conclusions are based on the observations and experience gleaned in a more inductive approach. Such an approach can never strive for absolute certitude. (1991, p. 274)

In this light, McCormick critiques Grisez's formulation of the BGT, not for the articulation of basic goods themselves, but for the method of their application that does not allow for the moral ambiguity that comes with "the complexity of reality", especially in "conflict situations" (1978, p. 34). Hence, Revisionist theorists are more apt than Basic Goods theorists to recognize the reality of conflict in moral decision-making (i.e., weighing one choice against another) and to consider in more depth the circumstances within which practical moral decisions are made.

While the interchanges between the Revisionists and the Basic Goods theorists delve deeply into both the philosophical and theological formulations of natural law, the following brief comparison of the two schools of thought provides an overview of points of agreement and disagreement. First, along with the BGT, Revisionist theory acknowledges the articulation of the basic goods as helpful in moral decision-making (Salzman, 2003). Furthermore, the Revisionists would agree that *in theory* the basic goods are incommensurable. As McCormick (1978) points out, however, *in practice* we *do* weigh the goods about which we must morally decide when the goods themselves are in conflict. Thus, the basic goods are not practically incommensurable. From this point arises the Revisionist notion of *proportionate good.* An inductive methodology, which moves from actual human experiences to theoretical conclusions (Curran, 1991), leads to the proposition that on specific occasions and in specific circumstances we must choose between goods. McCormick (1978) further posits that this choice does not necessarily will the destruction of the choice not taken, as the BGT proposes in the notion of incommensurability, but wills instead the proportionate good *in this circumstance.*

Second, the Revisionist theorists agree with the BG theorists about the existence and, to a great extent, the content of moral norms. Against the BG theorists (and the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church), however, they posit that moral norms pertaining to specific acts are not of themselves absolute (Salzman, 2003). Rather, in accounting for circumstance in the reality of moral decision-making, the Revisionists posit that proportionate reason weighs the acts in context and functions as the norm by which we judge the acts moral or not. In particular, Curran suggests that, when moral norms and judgements on specific human action focus disproportionately on the physical nature of the act itself rather than on a personalist perception of "the act in terms of the person placing the act" (1991, p. 282), they fail to account adequately for the moral complexity of human circumstance. Hence, the Revisionists see moral complexity and the necessity of proportionate decision-making as integral to moral theory and natural law. Curran surmises that acceptance of ambiguity in moral decision-making is in fact built in to Aquinas' formulation of natural law: "Despite the classical worldview of his day, in his system Thomas did leave room for the virtue of prudence and the creativity of the individual" (1991, p. 279). Hence, the moral norms are subject to proportionate reason in the particular context of the individual person.

One discussion of McCormick's work, in particular, focuses on his proportionalist interpretation of natural law: although he would not posit absolute moral norms, still he remains methodologically committed to constant norms as they are articulated by the Magisterium (Traina, 1999). Traina's feminist critique of McCormick is that, although he is open to the circumstantial realities of moral decision-making, his commitment to constant moral norms as articulated by the Magisterium does not allow procedurally for the experiences of women in their formulation. She maintains that an adequate natural law theory would incorporate women's experiences explicitly into the formulation of norms. Because the Magisterium has historically formulated its positions, teachings, and norms based on the experiences and scholarship of males (and, by and large, continues to do so), the norms themselves require revision. In her formulation of a feminist natural law, Traina (1999) attempts explicitly to address this issue. I will return to her work in more depth later.

Insofar as both theories (i.e., Basic Goods and Revisionist) accept that human persons are morally inclined towards basic goods and that we can articulate moral norms stemming from our perception of these goods, the BG theorists and the Revisionist theorists co-exist happily in the realm of natural law. However, in the application of the basic precepts, the two theories part ways: the BG theorists move towards incommensurability and absolute moral norms; the Revisionist theorists move towards proportionate decision-making and non-absolute moral norms. While the discussions between the two schools of thought engage the issues in much more depth and precision than have been articulated here, the basic premises provide enough of a snapshot to perceive the ways in which they affect conclusions regarding the morality of particular actions. If one follows the BGT as a formulation of natural law, one might conclude that moral decisions are merely the correct application of the Modes of Responsibility towards integral human fulfillment as fleshed out in the Basic Goods. Further, this application ought to be in accordance with non-absolute or absolute moral norms, particularly those articulated by the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. If one follows the Revisionist theory as a formulation of natural law, one might conclude that moral decisions are the practical and proportionate consideration of the Basic Goods, whereby one applies non-absolute moral norms according to the particular circumstance in which one finds oneself.

While both contemporary formulations of natural law provide insight into its ongoing evolution, neither seems completely capable of meeting the exigencies of moral decision-making in the light of women's particular experiences. With regard to the Basic Goods Theory, for instance, a woman might well find herself facing a conflict between the basic good of authentic expression of self-integration and the basic good of marriage. If a woman's marriage is itself an impediment to authentic expression of self-integration (for example, because of abuse), then the woman is left with her moral hands tied between the incommensurability of the two basic goods. In reality, as the Revisionists suggest, the woman would in fact be likely to weigh the goods before her in the light of her own circumstances and decide to act in support of one of the two goods. This would not necessarily mean that she willfully is acting to destroy the other good, it means rather that she finds one good proportionately more pressing in the light of the moral choice facing her.

Continuing the inquiry into the practical application of natural law with regard to the Revisionist theory, if the same woman were to ascribe to the magisterial norm of the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage (Catechism, Part 2, Art. 7, I), the woman's moral agency would further be compromised by the acceptance of the norm itself. Because in the articulation of the norm there is no accounting for female experiences of male spousal abuse, its broad normative application is compromised by its intrinsic limitation. In this case, the woman's practical agency is also compromised by the virtual absence of her experience within the norm itself. Hence, the Revisionist theory, by committing to existing moral norms, risks forfeiting the voices of women in its formulation of natural law.

Further, to apply the inquiry into the practical application of natural law in the light of Aquinas' formulation reintroduces Curran's discussion of historical consciousness and inductive methodology into the theological enterprise. Aquinas' own applications of the natural law are bound by the historical context in which he lived, "unquestioningly ordered around the sexual and social hierarchies of the medieval world" (Beattie, 2006, p. 58). Still, his methodology initiates a pathway into consideration of how natural law might incorporate females' bodily experiences into an understanding of sexuality ordered towards integral human fulfillment in the contextual realities of human lives.

Each of the natural law theory's formulations above is both helpful and limited in its contribution to a theological discussion of female bodies, sexualities, and experiences. I suggest that a feminist formulation of natural law is best able to address the concerns raised by the limitations of the above natural law theories. Prior to discussing feminist natural law in depth, however, it is necessary to address other contemporary formulations of sexual theology that also contribute to feminist natural law. Thus in the following section I address Christian body theologies that have developed in the latter half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

The Body, Eros, and Theology

While it would be false to suggest that historical discourse about sexual theology has ignored the body, it would be accurate to suggest that the body has been eyed with suspicion as an impediment to holiness, as witnessed in the pervasive dualisms (Cahill, 1996 & 1995). To counter such a negative understanding of the body and sex, body theologies that recognize the goodness of Eros and attend to positive human erotic experiences have begun to arise. Within the Christian theological context, different branches of theologies exist that take decidedly different approaches to the body: these branches stem from 1) the loosely kindred erotic/body theologies and 2) the more specifically articulated Theology of the Body.

Erotic/Body Theologies

To counter the negative understanding of the body and sex arising from the dualisms, body theologies that recognize the goodness of Eros attend first to positive human erotic experiences, and further predicate sexual norms upon this recognition (e.g., Lorde, 1994). In affirming the body as constitutive of personhood, erotic/body theologies refute the Enlightenment location of morality and thought ahistorically and outside of the body (e.g., Heyward, 1989; Nelson, 1978). They suggest, rather, that "embodiedness is constitutive of human consciousness" (Cahill, 1996, p. 73). Reacting against a theoretical split in the human person that would have the mind in opposition against and superior to the body, embodiment theologies aim to reclaim the goodness of the body as created in the image of God.

Insofar as human bodies are good and tend towards fulfillment in union with God, so too must be human sexuality. Further, embodiment theologies aim to reconnect the spiritual and the sexual in the human body, in the human drive towards the sacred (Cahill, 1995). The following lengthy citation from Nelson and Longfellow (1994) provides an insightful overview of a sexual theology of embodiment:

> Theologically, we believe that human sexuality, while including God's gift of the procreative capacity, is most fundamentally the divine invitation to find our destinies not in loneliness but in deep connection. To the degree that it is free from the distortions of unjust and abusive power relations, we experience our sexuality as the basic *eros* of our humanness that urges, invites, and lures us out of our loneliness into intimate communication and communion with God and the world. It is instructive to remember that the word "sexuality" itself comes from the Latin *sexus,* probably akin to the Latin *secare,* meaning to cut or divide – suggesting incompleteness seeking wholeness and connection that reaches through and beyond our differences and divisions. Sexuality, in sum, is the physiological and emotional grounding of our capacities to love. (p. xiv)

The inductive methodology permeating embodiment theologies starts with human sexual experience in constructing its sexual theology, rather than starting with theological conclusions applied to sexual experience in the determination of moral goodness (Nelson, 1992). In this light, embodiment theologies can more readily accommodate different experiences of human sexuality.[9]

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[9] Unlike contemporary theoretical discourse on sex and gender, however, Christian embodiment theologies continue to posit a *telos,* an end, towards which human sexuality is directed, that is, union with God. This direction is further understood as constitutive of human sexuality, and thus constitutes a universal human reality, also disputed in contemporary theoretical discourse.

True to the Christian theological tenet of the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, embodiment theologies point to the presence of God in human flesh and sexuality. Through our sexualities God continues to be revealed to us in the flesh, in our bodies. Because God chose to become completely human while remaining completely divine, human bodily sexuality is graced by divine presence in the sexual person. Persons find God in the bodily realities of human existence, including sexual expression and, therefore, human sexual expression is potentially revelatory of God. This revelation takes place not only personally, to the individual, but also communally, to all of creation (Cahill, 1995). Thus, "our sexuality invites us to intimacy not only with the beloved person but also with all creation. It is intimacy marked by right relationships, mutual power, and justice in our social structures" (Nelson & Longfellow, 1994, p. xv).

In addition to the early and ongoing theological work of James Nelson with regard to body theologies is the work of feminist Christian theologian Carter Heyward. Heyward's early text on erotic/body theology, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (1989), remains a benchmark in explicitly feminist discussion of theology and the body. For Heyward, the historical Christian dualisms were particularly harmful to women. Indeed, social and individual sexual injustices against women were predicated on the dualistic notion of female inferiority to males. Thus, by reclaiming the goodness of the body, she claims we also are able to move towards a more just relational experience among males and females; the erotic yearning for mutuality moves justice beyond the individual sexual/personal level to the social level. Thus, any abusive relationship is a "distortion" of the true erotic that breaks off "mutuality" or "right relation" with injustice in a "power over" relationship (in contrast to a "power with" relationship) (Heyward, 1989, pp. 187-195). For Heyward, moral "normativity" is situated in the constructed sexual reality of the individual with regard to their embodied experiences; she rejects sexual normativity as it exists outside of subjective experience.

The body theologies, including those of James Nelson and Carter Heyward, reflect the theological turn to personalism in the early–mid twentieth century. According to Cahill (1996), "personalism is a characteristically modern phenomenon in that it stresses the priority and the experience of the human subject. Intersubjective values become pre-eminently important in moral thinking" (p. 194). Distancing moral thought regarding sexuality and sexual expression from the realm of the abstract and universal, and moving it into the realm of the concrete and personal, works well to recognize the complexity of moral decision-making (as the Revisionists purport in their formulation of natural law).

One difficulty in working from a strictly personalist stance, however, is the moral ambiguity that may arise among actual decision-makers. The perception that abusive situations in sexuality are merely a distortion of the true mutuality inherent in the erotic serves to minimize, if not dismiss, the very real negative sexual experiences that many people endure. While it is true that attention to each individual subject and context is a necessary aspect of moral reflection, still any overly romantic notion of the erotic subject as able to return to the essence of Eros as good is inattentive to the very real difficulties of moral decision-making in any particular context. Also, if we are completely constructed in our sexuality (as Heyward proposes), then our actual physical bodies as sexually differentiated have no real meaning. Further, although it is necessary to attune to the goodness of the body as created in the image of God, in the face of sexual violation, one's subjective sexual normativity might indeed be more harmful than helpful in particular situations. Such normativity requires adult developmental capacities to realize safely. If one's history and/or current reality does not reflect such development, it is unlikely that a purely subjective normativity will serve to protect one's ensuing vulnerabilities. Here, it is helpful to recall Aquinas' observation that persons' capacities for decision-making are variable and that the more detailed the reality, the more prone we are to error.

Theology of the Body

Pope John Paul II takes a different tack towards personalism in his *Theology of the Body (TB)*. John Paul, then Karol Wojtyla, began to articulate his Theology of the Body long before he became Pope, in his *Love and Responsibility* (1981), originally published in Polish in 1960. His more extensive *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (1997) is a collection of Wednesday addresses given between September 1979 (shortly after he assumed the papacy) and November 1984. Neither of these works constitutes official magisterial teaching of the Church, but their substance is reflected in a great many of John Paul's subsequent official papal teachings (e.g., *Evangelium Vitae,* 1995a; *Familiaris Consortio,* 1981; *Mulieris*

Dignitatem, 1988; *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis,* 1994; and *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993). Indeed, a good deal of the substance of the contemporary *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (initially published in 1994, with subsequent editions) bears the hallmark of John Paul's thinking. His "Personalist Thomism" adopted in the TB looms largely in contemporary Catholic thought on sex, sexuality, gender, and relationship.

Not unlike the personalism of other body theologies, John Paul's personalism holds a vision of integrated persons as physical, spiritual, cognitive, and social. His Theology of the Body centers on the human, acting person in relationship with God. Most importantly, John Paul interprets the authentic meaning of the body as God has intended for humans.[10] This interpretation focuses largely on the sexual nature of the human person and the ways in which our actions reflect or deny the will of God. A number of potent concepts within John Paul's TB bear substantial weight in contemporary theological discourse on sexuality.

Pope John Paul II addresses the biblical creation accounts found in the Book of Genesis (chapters 1 and 2)[11] and the subsequent account of the fall of humanity (chapter 3) as a basis for understanding authentic human sexuality and anthropology (John Paul II, 1997, pp. 25-102, re: "Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis"). He develops what he terms the "nuptial" meaning of the body, that is, that the body points to the communion of persons within the covenant and sacrament of marriage, as outlined in *Genesis 2*. He refers to the complementarity of Adam and Eve and the gift of the body that the man gives to the woman (and vice versa) in both the unitive and procreative functions of sexual intercourse.[12] Hence, in sexual intimacy we give the total "gift of self" to one another. This gift of self, he proposes, is the original manifestation of males and females as human bodies (John Paul II, 1997). The rather long following quotation provides an overview of John Paul's thought on the question.

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[10] Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body reflects the theological anthropology of "complementarity of the sexes" present in Pope Paul VI's papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968).

[11] The creation accounts in Genesis constitute an understanding of "pre-lapsarian" humanity, that is, humanity in its created ideal, prior to the fall into sin *(Genesis 3)*. The text is as much an account of the human capacity for sin as it is an account of God's work of creation. Its explanatory nature provides insight into both human frailty and God's will for human goodness. See Clifford and Murphy (1990) and Trible (1978).

> Seeing each other, as if through the mystery of creation, man and woman see each other even more fully and distinctly than through the sense of sight itself, that is, through the eyes of the body. They see and know each other with all the peace of the interior gaze, which creates precisely the fullness of the intimacy of persons… Shame brings with it a specific limitation in seeing with the eyes of the body. This takes place above all because personal intimacy is disturbed and almost threatened by this sight. According to Genesis 2:25, the man and the woman were not ashamed seeing and knowing each other in all the peace and tranquility of the interior gaze. They communicate in the fullness of humanity, which is manifested in them as reciprocal complementarity precisely because they are "male" and "female". At the same time, they communicate on the basis of that communion of persons in which, through femininity and masculinity, they become a gift for each other. In this way they reach in reciprocity a special understanding of the meaning of their own body. (John Paul II, 1997, p. 57ff)

In developing the nuptial meaning of the body, John Paul points not only to the necessary complementarity of male and female as willed by God, he further points to the necessary sexual "self-donation" or "gift of self" that must accompany authentic sexual interaction between a married male and female. To accomplish this self-gift, one must first accomplish self-mastery, for if one is not fully in possession of oneself, then the gift of self to another cannot be free and authentic (John Paul II, 1997, pp. 60 – 66). For John Paul, it is only in self-mastery that one finds freedom: freedom to do the will of God. Thus, the gift of self to another must be total, and, for John Paul, this total gift is only possible in the divinely ordained sacrament of marriage. Drawing further on the notions of complementarity, self-gift, and the physical reality of male and female bodies, John Paul concludes that the natural end of the nuptial meaning of the body is procreation (1997, pp. 62-63).

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[12] The dual aspects of marital sexual intercourse (i.e., unitive and procreative) were first affirmed in the encyclical *Casti Connubii* (Pope Pius XI, 1930) and became ensconced as inseparable aspects, willed by God, in *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968). These documents mark the first magisterial teachings to recognize the unitive reality of marital sexual intercourse. The theological discussion of these "inseparable aspects" within *Humanae Vitae* remains a watershed in Roman Catholic sexual theology.

Thus any contraceptive act between spouses is a violation of the nuptial gift of self. The capacity to achieve self-mastery with regard to one's sexual expression becomes a cornerstone in John Paul's development of marital sexual relationships as bodily expressions:

> According to the criterion of this truth [i.e., the inseparable aspects of marital sexual intercourse as articulated in *Humanae Vitae*], which should be expressed in the language of the body, the conjugal act signifies not only love, but also potential fecundity. Therefore it cannot be deprived of its full and adequate significance by artificial means. In the conjugal act it is not licit to separate the unitive aspect from the procreative aspect, because both the one and the other pertain to the intimate truth of the conjugal act. The one is activated together with the other and in a certain sense the one by means of the other. This is what the encyclical teaches (cf. *HV* 12). Therefore, in such a case the conjugal act, deprived of its interior truth because it is artificially deprived of its procreative capacity, ceases also to be an act of love. (1997, p. 398)

In the final analysis, therefore, the nuptial meaning of the body points unwaveringly to the full union of the spouses and their openness to procreation. This is why God created humanity male and female; in this creation are inherent roles and responsibilities proper to each of the sexes[13] (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF], 2004).

Pope John Paul's II's Theology of the Body has enjoyed a mixed reception. Supporters of it tend also to be supportive of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* (1968) and, indeed, of most magisterial teachings. They are happy to embrace John Paul II's reiteration of the unchanging norms of the Catholic tradition regarding sexual ethics on the one hand, and his personalist approach on the other. Glick states: "The Pope set out to make a strong theological and personalistic defense of *Humanae Vitae*, and painstakingly laid considerable groundwork in order to do so… Certainly John Paul II is answering his own call… for a fuller development of the personalistic reasons behind the received teaching" (1986, p. 24) (see also: Rousseau, 2000; Shivanandan, 2001; and West, 2004, 2003, 1998, and www.christopherwest.com/works.asp).[14] Perhaps the most enticing aspect of John Paul's Theology of the Body, however, is its personalistic appeal to the relational experiences of contemporary Catholics (Cloutier, 2006).[15] As West notes in his Prologue to *Theology of the Body Explained* (2003),

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[13] See, for example, the sections entitled "Man and Woman: A Gift for Each Other" (pp. 69-72) and "The Mystery of Woman is Revealed in Motherhood" (pp. 80-83).

[14] Christopher West is largely recognized as the pre-eminent North American interpreter of John Paul II's TB. Because John Paul's own work is dense, many non-theologians turn to West's (2004) basic introduction as a means of accessing the Pope's work.

[15] Interestingly, Cloutier (2006) notes that John Paul's TB seems to speak to young people against a culture of sexual *selfishness* and the *instrumentalization* of relationships, and to lead them towards

John Paul believed it imperative that the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* (1968) be brought to life in a personalistic ethic, one that could speak to the lives of faithful Catholics the world over. For John Paul, the whole of our perception of human life was tied up in the teachings promulgated therein.

While West and others are unreservedly enthusiastic about Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, still it has its detractors. Critiques of the TB cover a range of objections. Feminist objections focus on the repercussions of John Paul's adherence to the anthropological notion of essential complementarity of the sexes (e.g., Cahill, 1996; Kaveny, 2003). A particular critique here is that, despite the personalist approach to body theology, still John Paul manages to sustain magisterial norms that are largely devoid of attention to actual female sexual experiences. Further, the roles iterated regarding the complementary nature of males and females reinforce gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Kaveny, 2003). From a feminist perspective, the notion that women's special genius is tied primarily to the role of nurturing mother belies the experiences of many contemporary females.[16] Also, the implications of a complementary nature of the sexes move beyond heterosexual normativity into the condemnation of homosexuality as a disordered expression of the "nuptial meaning of the body" (Ross, 2001). So while clearly problematic for

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loving in a "truly self-giving way". He further hypothesizes that TB "generally appeals to two sorts of people: people disaffected by the past emptiness of their sexual experience (often men?) and people with very little experience of relationships (often women?). Both of these groups find in the Theology of the Body a support for their own idealism about love and relationships, about the immense possibilities offered by human relationships" (p. 203, no. 34).

[16] This claim would be refuted by the "New Feminists": female theologians within the Roman Catholic tradition who, responding to Pope John Paul II's call for a "new feminism" (1995), have worked to substantiate the "feminine genius" of women based upon John Paul's TB (e.g., Allen, 2006; Lemmons, 2002; Sweeny, 2006).

females, the TB also further marginalizes non-heterosexuals in accordance with traditional moral norms.

Another critique of John Paul II's Theology of the Body is that, despite its professed personalism, "it represents a mode of theology that has little to say to ordinary people because it shows so little awareness of ordinary life" (Johnson, 2001, p. 12). In his overview and critique of the TB, Johnson takes extended issue with John Paul's lack of attention to the empirical bodily realities of human persons, both sexually and non-sexually, and wonders at a perception of revelation on human bodiliness that ends in the scriptural accounts of creation and redemption (Johnson, 2001).[17] This critique is echoed by Modras (1988): John Paul's unique reading of the scriptural accounts of pre-lapsarian humanity and sexual normativity as arising therefrom is problematic in the light of contemporary biblical scholarship; his perception of anything less than a "total self-gift" to one's spouse as selfish seems inattentive to contemporary psychological data that question whether completely self-giving love is even possible (or wise/prudent);[18] and his suggestion that only in self-mastery over our passions will persons find freedom seems to negate the possibility of goodness in spontaneous emotional, playful, and loving acts towards a committed other.

I suggest that the most problematic aspect of the Theology of the Body for an adequate sexual theology is his reading of natural law and the method by which John

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[17] In response to Johnson's critique, Christopher West suggests that Johnson's dissatisfaction with John Paul's TB arises from the fact that he "simply hasn't penetrated the Pope's project"; "in layman's terms, he just doesn't 'get it'" (West, www.christopherwest.com/article5.asp).

[18] This concern is shared by Traina (2006) in the context of her consideration of discipleship and sexual morality in the "real world".

Paul constructs his conclusions. Because John Paul locates the true, nuptial meaning of the body in pre-lapsarian humanity, he must then locate lust (i.e., when one sees the other as the "object of one's own desire"…"at the cost of a real and full communion of persons" [1997, p. 123]) and other sexual sins in post-lapsarian humanity. This reading creates the anthropological conundrum of positing as normative a morality based upon the absence of sin in the human condition, rather than a normative morality based on the very real human experience of sinfulness and grace. Hence, the "real and full communion of persons" as manifesting the nuptial meaning of the body seems, quite literally, beyond our capacity as post-lapsarian humans. John Paul proposes that the natural, authentic state of humanity lies in the creation of Adam and Eve, prior to the introduction of original sin into our human reality.

As West points out, for John Paul, "original sin marks precisely the subjective loss or obscuring of the nuptial meaning of the body" (2003, p. 99). Because the nuptial meaning of the body is the basis for sexual normativity, we are called to live a sexual morality that is based on the ideal state of human sexual relationships. We accomplish this morality through relationship with Christ (West, 2004, pp. 19-20). This position seems to be in contrast to the Roman Catholic natural law tradition, which holds that "grace completes nature rather than contradicting it" (Traina, 2006, p.87). That is, the grace we encounter in relationship with God works in the context of concomitant human realities of essential goodness and the capacity to sin.

In effect, John Paul is proposing that what is ideal is in fact normative, and that we are called to live outside of original sin. Because his personalism is nigh void of reference to empirical data about the lived realities of human persons, his call to a pre-lapsarian norm seems methodologically faulty as a personalist Thomism. What is ideal (i.e., without original sin) or prior to the actual reality of humans (i.e., capacity to sin and access grace), cannot, in fact, be natural to us. Therefore, the norm of the nuptial meaning of the body sits outside of the methodological requirements of natural law.

Feminist Sexual Ethics: Of Bodies, Sex, and Gender

Arising from the previous discussions of natural law and embodiment theologies are contemporary questions regarding notions of universality and normativity, and sex and gender. Prior to proposing a feminist natural law theory as the methodological ground upon which an adequate sexual theology of adolescent girls can be constructed, it is important to situate the theory in the contemporary theoretical landscape regarding bodies, sex, and gender. For our purposes in particular, it is important to chart briefly both the feminist theological discourses and the feminist theoretical discourses in response to traditional theoretical and practical formulations of human sexual morality. What are contemporary feminists saying about the body, sex, and gender, and about subjectivity and universality?

Feminist Sexual Ethics: Theological Perspectives

In the realm of body theologies, many formulations are explicitly feminist in orientation. However, a hallmark of all feminist theological ethics is explicit attention to women's experiences and women's flourishing. Grounding themselves in the interrogation of anthropological dualisms informing the Christian theological tradition, feminist sexual ethics have critiqued the limitations of such an account of the human. In particular, noting that females have been understood as deficient males, feminist theological anthropologies have sought, within numerous theoretical stances, to reformulate a Christian account of human experience (e.g., Coakley, 2002; Coll, 1994; Fulkerson, 1997; Jones, 1997; Ruether, 1983). Feminist theologians have pointed out that the negative construction of female characteristics within the dualisms has perpetuated the oppression of females in all spheres. Most notably, this oppression includes violence against women (Lebacqz, 1994; Thistlethwaite, 1989), which clearly renders this formulation an untenable theological and social construct.

Lebacqz (1994) points out that perpetuation of a general power differential between males and females leaves women in a precarious relational position. More pointedly, she explores the ambiguity and variety of female sexual experience and notes the pitfalls of any theology that romanticizes the experience of male/female relationships - John Paul II's Theology of the Body, for example. The reality of a history and ongoing pattern of male violence against females, particularly in intimate sexual relationships, leads Lebacqz to conclude that when inviting women into male/female partnerships, we must be mindful that we are, in effect, asking women to "love their enemies".[19] Her point, far from demonizing men, is to "attend to the realities of the links between violence and sexuality in the experiences of women" in order to recognize what is at stake for women in male/female relationships (Lebacqz, 1994, p. 244).

> To recognize the one whom one loves as "enemy" is to accept the implications of the social construction of sexuality and to understand that the task is not simply to create a private haven into which one can retreat, but is to work for a new social construction of sexuality that will undo the injustices that permeate the present culture. (Lebacqz, 1994, p. 257)

Lebacqz's concerns highlight the inadequacy of a theological anthropology and sexual theology that idealize the sexes as complementary. Although Pope John Paul II (1997) would state that violence and abuse is a sign of human sinfulness, he does not adequately account for its reality in his construction of human sexuality. Further, he discounts the possibility that the kind of "nuptial" relationships willed by God between heterosexual married partners could exist within a same-sex relationship (or any other of the multi-variant manifestations of human sexuality). Lebacqz's work addresses the realities of human sexuality and sexual interaction that are cause for reflection on what an authentic body theology might entail, beyond complementarity of the sexes. When considering the contextual realities in which female sexualities have historically been situated (i.e., the official Roman Catholic rejection of divorce, the historical ownership of females by males, and the disenfranchisement of females as "non-persons"), women's agency about their own relational well-being has been rather restricted (Gudorf, 1994).

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[19] Lebacqz's concerns are borne out by Canadian statistics regarding violence against women. For example, in 1998, 82.6% of victims in reported cases of sexual assault were women; 98% of the accused were men (Juristat Canadian Crime Statistics, 1998, vol.19, no.9; as cited in Ontario Women's Directorate: Violence Against Women, 2002). Also, statistical trends in 2006 seem to indicate that males' and females' experiences of violence differ relationally: "While men are more likely to be injured by strangers in a public or social venue, women are in greater danger of experiencing violence from intimate partners in their own homes. Women are also at greater risk of sexual violence. The fear of violence is more pervasive for women and can prevent them from taking part as full citizens in their communities" (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Feminists have also noted the failure of the Church's official position of complementarity adequately to capture the reality of gender and sex. Numerous official documents have posited, based on the *Genesis* biblical accounts of creation *(Gen. 1-2),* that God ordained the complementarity of the sexes as the natural order of intimate relationship (e.g., CDF, 2004; CDF, 1986). Feminist theologians point out that, while attention to sexual difference is theologically tenable, still the predication of specific gender roles on that basis is a social construction (Cahill, 1985; Coll, 1994; Gudorf, 1994). Thus contemporary feminist sexual theologies explicitly incorporate female sexual experience both to counter the male, hetero-normative history of Christian sexual theology, but also to challenge the assumptions about females inherent in the dualisms.

The most pointed example of hetero-normativity is the recognition that sex and sexuality in the Catholic theological tradition is focused on male orgasm (ejaculation, to be precise) and human reproduction. As Gudorf (1994) points out, in neither the consideration of sexual pleasure nor the understanding of female does the Church address actual female experiences beyond childbearing. Rather, women seem rather confined to roles most prominently personified in the person of Mary: Mother of God and perpetual virgin (see, for example, CDF, 2004; John Paul II, 1988). In contrast to the official theology, feminist theologians have given explicit consideration of and privilege to female sexual experience (Andolsen, 1996) and female sexual pleasure (Jung, 2000) as positive contributions to theological reflection. Both Andolsen and Jung point out that, without such consideration, contemporary sexual theology is destined to perpetuate a heterosexist theological formulation unfriendly to women. Feminists further note that the privileging of female sexual pleasure must always be accompanied by attention to justice within the social circumstances in which females live. Without such attention, female sexual pleasure itself is vulnerable to a biased construction within an elite population (Jantzen, 2002; Jung, 2002).

Clearly, traditional formulations of theological anthropology and sexuality are based on substantively inadequate experiential data. To address female sexualities successfully, feminist theology must meet two specific methodological challenges. The first challenge is to re-vision Roman Catholic methodology and procedure in such a way that it is able to incorporate the substantive content of females' experiences into its understanding of sexual ethics, while positing some normative account of human sexual ethics. This challenge will be addressed only in the light of the second challenge: to respond adequately to the post-modern, specifically post-structuralist, feminist deconstruction of the categories of sex, gender, and universality. In contemporary discourse, feminist theorists across disciplines have raised serious and important questions about the assumptions inherent in modern thought regarding sex, gender, subjectivity, and universality (e.g., Butler, 1999/1990; Irigaray, 1993, Kristeva & Clement, 2001; Nussbaum, 2000). These questions are particularly important to a project such as mine that endeavors to discuss issues of sex and gender, that assumes an ontological subject prior to social construction, and that attempts to suggest some normative ethical understanding of sexuality.

Feminist Theory: Sex, Gender, Subjectivity, Universality

Feminist theory, in particular third-wave feminist theory, has, as noted, offered important challenges to theoretical constructs of "the human" based upon notions of universality, subjectivity, and normativity. These challenges are rightly concerned with the manifestations of theory in oppressive practices towards persons sitting outside of prescribed norms of "human". As the previous discussions suggest, females have been but one group of non-normative humans, based upon traditional dualistic anthropologies. Feminist theologians are thus faced with the task of tangling with the dialectic of particulars and universals regarding anthropologies. This dialectic leads to questions regarding the ethics of relationships. To what extent does "difference" pertain to our anthropological formulations? What are we scholars able to say ethically when faced with profound cultural "difference" of values? Here feminist theologians must engage with and be informed by the work of feminists in other disciplines.

The most prominent feminist theorist addressing questions of sex, gender, subjectivity, and universals is Judith Butler. Butler's own struggle with being identified in a sexual category informed her scholarship with regard to sexual identity (2004b). Although she self-identified as a lesbian, she was reluctant to do so because the category of "lesbian" was problematized in the political realm, carrying with it normatively expected behaviour in feminist theory and feminist theoretical circles alike. Hence Butler became one of the early proponents of Queer theory, the theoretical destabilization of the subject through the interrogation of the categories of sex, gender, and identity (Butler, 1999/1990). With the publication of her first major work, *Gender Trouble* (1999/1990),[20] and subsequent other works, Butler delves deeply into her post-structuralist feminist deconstruction of gender and sex and her concomitant notions of performativity and identity.

In *Gender Trouble* (1999/1990), Butler takes previous feminisms to task for their dualistic (or "binary") formulations of human sexualities in male and female; she thus introduces her understanding of the construction not only of gender but also of sex. In positing that both gender and sex are socially constructed, Butler leaves open the question of the body as a site of social hegemony. That is, the body becomes contested in its discursive construction in the same way that gender is: what it means to be masculine/male or feminine/female has everything to do with one's concrete context. While she does not dispute the materiality of the physical body (Butler, 1993), Butler does propose that in and of itself biological sex has no meaning. Thus sexual identification becomes manifest in the notions of performativity and parody: gender and sex are constructed through the repetition, reiteration, and regulation of acts, which at times transgress hegemonic social constructions (e.g., heteronormativity). The body is the locus of those performative, constructive acts (1999/1990; 1993; 1997; 2004b).

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[20] *Gender Trouble* was originally published in 1990 and was re-released in a tenth anniversary edition in 1999. I cite the 1999 publication.

In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler also questions the very ontology of the subject as a "fixed identity". Rather (as is characteristic of Queer theory), Butler posits the fluid nature of the sexual subject. She distinctly aims to disturb the notion that philosophical terms and categories are stable and fixed and to trouble the idea that there is an ontological subject with a fixed identity at the helm of the ethical agent. This leads to her questioning the possibility of universal claims with regard to human experience, and in particular, human sexual experience. By disturbing the notion of a universal human subjectivity, Butler is echoing the broader post-modern critique of hegemonic understandings of the human person. Recognizing the methodological and procedural difficulties of having elite groups (e.g., philosophers, intellectuals, males) positing truths for all of humanity, independent of individual experiences, post-modern theorists, including Butler, counter with an assumption of difference among persons. Hence Butler concludes that scholars may have nothing to say about universal, normative morality.

Butler's philosophical move away from universal normativity is most pronounced in her earlier works (e.g., *Gender Trouble*, 1999/1990 & *Bodies that Matter*, 1993). In her later work, for example, some of the essays in *Undoing Gender* (2004a), she seems to step away from an outright denial of the universal and seems rather to suggest an unfolding and fluid perception of universals and norms in service of the transformation of human society. (See, for example, Butler, 2004a, pp. 174-203.[21])

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[21] An interesting citation from this essay (p. 191) has Butler using the phrase the "not yet" in her articulation of the universal. In the Christian theological tradition, the phrase "not yet" is commonly

While Butler continues to posit the deconstruction of existing identity categories, still she seems to propose that universals do not so much exist *de facto,* as become ever more adequately articulated by those historically excluded in the categories of human: the "different".

In the light of post-modern and particularly post-structuralist feminist critiques of sex, gender, subjectivity, and universality, an adequate feminist sexual theology must address the reality of difference among persons. It must also address the concomitant understanding that highlights experience as the primary, normative account of women's lives and morality. If women's experiences vary infinitely from one culture to the next, from one individual to the next, then we scholars have no business making universal claims. The difficulty with such an understanding, however, is that then neither do we have any business claiming universal rights. We are left in a quandary about what to say to females as a group, if we have no way of understanding females as a group.

However, an adequate feminist sexual theology must also account for the theological tradition in which it sits. It must account for the human realities of sin and grace; it must account for the history of oppression of vulnerable individuals and groups; and it must account for hope in personal and social transformation, and conversion of human persons. Most importantly, it must also account for the profoundly

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juxtaposed with "already now" in the formulation of the reality of Christian existence. We have God in our midst "already now", but we have "not yet" encountered the fullness of the divine. In particular, in the Pauline letters of the Christian scriptures, this juxtaposition accounts for grace and human sinfulness while awaiting the Parousia. See for example Laporte, 1988.

incarnational nature of the Christian faith. Because we are all created in the image of God, we have a shared inheritance of human dignity and a resulting responsibility to and for one another in our interconnectedness. An adequate Christian sexual theology must not lose sight of the human body as the creation of a loving God. As a result of this faith claim, we must be able to articulate (or at least begin to articulate) what supports or diminishes human bodily dignity and flourishing[22] in the world, both individually and socially.

To this end, feminist theologians from a number of stances are addressing the concerns raised in post-modern and post-structuralist theories. Serene Jones (2000) (within a Protestant feminist theology) and Donna Teevan (2003) (within a Roman Catholic feminist theology) recognize the importance of seriously engaging feminist theoretical claims in the development of feminist theologies. Teevan identifies a number of helpful insights for feminist theology stemming from post-structuralist feminism. Yet, along with Serene Jones, she opts for *strategic essentialism* in feminist theologies. This position holds that while the human subject is historically conditioned, it is not entirely socially constructed. Hence, while attending to the particular and social experiences of women in their historical circumstances, still they would posit universal status for human rights based on dignity and flourishing. Also from within the Roman Catholic tradition, Tina Beattie (2006) engages contemporary post-structuralist theory more explicitly in her interrogation of traditional and neo-orthodox theological anthropologies. Beattie is particularly concerned with the rise of anthropologies that support historical gender stereotypes often oppressive of women (for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose theological anthropology informed that of Pope John Paul II). She effectively engages contemporary feminist theory as a dialogue partner in the development of a feminist theological anthropology in tune with women's particular experiences. Finally, working from within the Anglican tradition, Sarah Coakley also engages contemporary feminist theory, but does so in continual dialogue with historical theological formulations of similar questions (e.g., Coakley, 2002; see also Bynum, 1995).

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[22] I will address the notion of "human flourishing" and its relevance to my work in more depth in following chapters.

From a specifically ethical perspective, Roman Catholic theologian Margaret Farley considers feminism and universal morality (1993) and ultimately proposes a framework for Christian sexual ethics (2006). Farley makes the case for the precarious walk between universal norms articulated in order to advance human flourishing, and particular accounts of women's experiences in order to uncover their oppressed realities ensuing from social constructions. For Farley, any abstraction of one particular facet of the human experience to normativity that by default jeopardizes another's well-being is morally untenable. However, to dismiss the possibility of an ethic that recognizes the interconnectedness of the human community and our concomitant responsibility to one another by virtue of the radical social construction of the human subject leaves us morally paralyzed in the face of difference. This proposition is also morally untenable. In this light, Farley outlines broad norms aimed at articulating what might constitute "Just Sex" (2006, pp. 215-232), norms that are "bottom-line requirements", that "admit of degrees", "that are not mutually exclusive", and that require "respect for an embodied as well as inspirited" human reality (pp. 215-216).

Having situated a feminist sexual ethic within the context of post-modern and post-structural feminist thought, I now turn to the initial challenge facing feminist theological sexual ethics. In the light of feminist concerns for the particular circumstances of individual females, an adequate sexual theology must, again, re-vision Roman Catholic methodology and procedures in such a way that it is able to incorporate the substantive content of females' experiences into its understanding of sexual ethics, while positing some normative account of human sexual ethics. Having found profound inadequacies in the traditional and official formulations of human anthropology and sexuality based upon particular readings of the natural law tradition; having found contemporary formulations of natural law wanting with regard to females' realities; and having queried contemporary feminist theory regarding sex, gender, and universals and discerning no normative account of sexual ethics; I am faced with the task of constructing, from the wisdoms of each previous account, a sexual theological ethic that accounts for adolescent females. Although the difficult path between an ethical theory based on essentials and universals, and one based on contingencies and particulars appears rather precarious, I suggest that within a feminist formulation of natural law there is a basis for the construction of a theological sexual ethic robust enough to prove fruitful. As Porter (1999) has pointed out, the scholastics themselves walked this difficult path in their particular formulation of natural law. Cristina Traina (1999) provides the most comprehensive feminist natural law formulation to date. However, other feminist theologians have articulated and applied more limited formulations of feminist natural law. Thus it would seem that the difficult path is not without its adventurers.

Feminist Natural Law Theory

Feminist natural law is a contemporary theological rereading of the theory of natural law that attends both structurally and substantively to females' realities in the world, while attempting to discern what is normatively human and ethical. I begin with a brief exploration of a number of limited accounts of feminist rereading of the theological theory of natural law.

Initial Voices

In the context of her exploration of Christian sexual ethics by way of the body, sex, and pleasure, Christine Gudorf (1994) briefly articulates a feminist reformulation of natural law. Gudorf identifies the inadequacy of a static understanding of historicity, particularly as regards human evolution. For her, the defining problem with the official Roman Catholic formulation of natural law as it pertains to sexuality is that its physicalist understanding of the human person does not provide for evolution in understanding the physiological reality of procreation. Such a static approach to the sexual person leaves the tradition open to an outdated and limited perception of morally normative sexual behaviour. In particular, the official teaching is insulated against the real sexual experiences of women. This insulation in turn creates a natural law formulation that is unable adequately to address women's sexual lives, because it is ill equipped to address historicity and the unfolding of human sexual reality in the first place. For Gudorf, a feminist natural law ethic clearly must embrace both the particular sexual experiences of women and some general understanding of human sexuality (1994, pp. 51-80).

In a decidedly Lonerganian[23] approach, Cynthia Crysdale (1995) revisions natural law out of the classicist worldview from which it emerged and into an historically conscious worldview. She cites Bernard Lonergan (1972) in noting that the classicist worldview would see both nature and reason (the Thomistic components of natural law) as static entities that are best understood by necessary laws. On the contrary, the historically conscious worldview would acknowledge the dynamic unfolding of both nature and reason in the form of statistical probability. That is, not everything that exists can be understood as necessary. Her conclusion regarding natural law in the light of these insights is that human persons live in a situation that calls to both necessary (classical) laws and statistical laws in the unfolding of human reality. The important point here, for Crysdale, is that we do not confuse one for the other in our formulation of natural law. Our theological task is to discern between what are necessary (or universal) aspects of creation and what are statistical possibilities (or probabilities) in the unfolding of creation. Indeed, by identifying as universal that which is merely statistically probable, we become vulnerable to an hegemonic understanding of reason or nature that impedes genuine human flourishing in the particular.[24]

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[23] Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) was a Canadian Roman Catholic Jesuit scholar who wrote authoritatively in the areas of Economics, Philosophy, and Method in Theology. His two most influential works, *Insight* (1957) and *Method in Theology* (1972) have been the focus of extensive scholarly discussion. Although to some extent Lonergan's thought informs my own, I do not engage his work explicitly here.

Finally, in her 1985 (pp. 105-122) consideration of foundations for Christian sexual ethics, Lisa Sowle Cahill lays the groundwork for a feminist natural law that she addresses in more depth in 1997. Cahill notes that Aquinas' openness to particular circumstances in moral reflection makes a feminist reinterpretation of natural law in the light of historicity consistent with the early formulations of the tradition. And while it would be anachronistic and false to identify Aquinas as a feminist (given his anthropological conclusions), still his general methodological approach to natural law is rather compatible with a feminist concern for difference. Further, within a reformulation of natural law, Cahill proposes that feminists can attend to the concern for women's flourishing both particularly and universally.

While each of these scholars considers a feminist reformulation of natural law important to the work of feminist ethics, none of them attempts a systematic inquiry into what such an ethic would entail. In her articulation of feminist natural law, Cristina Traina (1999) undertakes just such a systematic inquiry in a contemporary context. Her development of a feminist natural law ethic provides a sort of strategic essentialism that in turn creates a useful ethical web in which to weave a sexual theology that is both appropriate and adequate for adolescent girls.

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[24] I articulate the concept of genuine human flourishing in more depth below.

Primary Voice: Cristina Traina and the End of Anathemas

My choice of Cristina Traina (1999 & 1997) as a primary dialogue partner stems from her thorough consideration of natural law and engagement with feminist theories and concerns. While her work embodies a strategic essentialism useful in feminist dialogue, it also engages the Catholic theological tradition of natural law in a refreshing and helpful way. In particular, forwarding the evolution of the Catholic theological tradition regarding sexual ethics provides an open space to engage the realities of adolescent girls in relevant and appropriate ways.

Traina succinctly identifies why exactly a feminist natural law ethic is needed in contemporary feminist dialogue: "feminism exists to free women from human oppression and, more broadly, from all forces that prevent their flourishing. In order to accomplish this task, feminism needs some relatively stable point of critical leverage, some point beyond which systems and behaviors are clearly wrong" (1999, p. 5). This need is especially true, she points out, "in a social context inclined to exploit ambiguity, powerlessness, and reticence" (pp. 5-6). Traina attempts to walk the ambiguous path between a universalist natural law tradition that oppresses women with hegemonic notions of nature and the natural, and the deconstructive post-structuralist feminisms that so protect difference and contingency as to leave us politically paralyzed to act in the face of cultural oppression and harm of women. Indeed, Traina espouses a non-deterministic telic and thick anthropology with convictions about goals towards which humans are to strive (pp. 6-7, 12). Herein lies the basis for Traina's walk on the "line between tentativeness and absolutism" (p. 10).

Traina and Feminist Moral Discourse

Traina (1999) begins her discussion with an engagement of contemporary feminist discourse. Addressing Liberal Feminism, Naturalist Feminism, and Social Constructionism as possible feminist ethical methodologies (pp. 26-39), Traina points out that each in its own way constructs limitations on the moral demands feminists can make on behalf of women. She recognizes positively, however, that attention to each of these feminisms gives preliminary shape to the feminism she is attempting to formulate:

> It is committed to women's flourishing; to a critical realism that operates within the limitations and goals of human historical existence; to an historical, social, and mutually critical view of nature and reason; to the rights and dignity of individuals; to confident, prophetic transformation of and survival in an imperfect world; to inclusiveness, self-criticism, and humility. (1999, pp. 38-39)

Thus she addresses the epistemological and anthropological claims necessary to her formulation of feminist natural law. The primary epistemological criterion for Traina is the privileging of women's well-being: *a preferential option for women* (1999, pp. 39-42). Returning to her discussion of thick anthropology, Traina focuses on the tension between an absolute, fixed human anthropology that recognizes common points in our shared lives, and a tentative, flexible anthropology that recognizes the varied creativities of individuals making their way in the world. Here she proposes that human flourishing, a basic moral criterion for well-being, applies both to individuals and communities in concrete historical circumstances (pp. 42-48). In the end, she recognizes the sexed and gendered body as crucial to the anthropological consideration of the individual in the world. While it should not be the only criterion, certainly it must be taken into account (p. 47). The insights from a variety of feminist perspectives therefore nuance Traina's own approach to Christian ethics. She has set her course down the path that attends both to contemporary feminist claims and the theological tradition of natural law.

Traina and the Catholic Ethical Tradition

On a number of fronts, Traina engages the Catholic ethical tradition in depth. First, her examination of the formulation of the natural law in the hierarchical ecclesiastical realm includes reflections on both the use of casuistry and the development of personalism in natural law since Aquinas (1999, pp. 100-139). Casuistry is the use of cases to attend to moral dilemmas lacking the guidance of precedence or the precision of existing principles (Curran, 1999, pp. 164-165). When moral dilemmas lacking any precedent arise, analogous cases are applied to the dilemmas at hand as an inductive means of sorting through the moral similarities (or differences). This is an especially helpful methodology when social and religious realities face major upheaval and innovation. In such situations, where existing principles or maxims are not sufficient to solve moral dilemmas, casuistry allows for consideration of concrete circumstances (Rudy, 1994).[25] Over the course of the 15th – 17th centuries, when casuist theological scholarship flourished, casuists began to establish standards for moral action. Eventually, casuistry fell into disrepute as it became a rather more deductive application of the previously established standards for moral action than careful attention to concrete circumstances of cases. This disrepute was especially pronounced from the 17th century on, in the Roman Catholic practice of confession and penance, and in moral deliberation over circumstances arising from social and religious evolution (Jonson & Toulmin, 1988; Keenan, 1999 & 1996).

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[25] An often-cited example of the use of casuistry is the case of usury. In the growth of money economies of Europe (moving away from an economy of bartering) and increasing exploration and trade off of the European continent, business people were looking to insure their investments in somewhat speculative circumstances. Casuistry was a means of circumventing the prohibition of usury in order to allow for insurance of cargo and trade expeditions (Keenan, 1999).

Although it has a checkered history in Roman Catholic ethical thought, casuistry currently enjoys a revival in our post-modern context. It is a particularly useful methodology for contemporary situations in which moral questions evolve as quickly as technological (and other) knowledge advances; its fit within an inductive, "scientific" methodology increases its usefulness. Traina points out the advantage of casuist theory as a tool to mediate between what is and what ought to be. She also notes, however, that its historical abuse in practice within the tradition indicates its vulnerability to an eventual static consideration of moral realities (Traina, 1999, pp. 102-106).[26] Its historical resistance to attending to the case at hand in plural and diverse circumstances also left it further open to the vagaries of its users: it is "only as good as its choice of paradigmatic case and therefore is only as good as the chooser, a casuist. A strong self-critical – or even a critical – principle is lacking in most of the Roman Catholic casuistical tradition" (p. 106). To work well with casuistry, the casuist must have the ability to undertake prudent moral discernment, not merely to apply pre-existing principles and norms.

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[26] Keenan (1996) states that the abuse of casuistry within the Roman Catholic moral tradition reached its peak "from the 18th century until the Second Vatican Council, that is, during the period when moralists wrote manuals to differentiate permitted from sinful activity… existing principles were simply applied deductively to a case and the case was solved. In geometric or manualist casuistry, it is a principle and not the case that is the standard" (pp. 129-130). In such an application of casuistry, the subject was nigh removed from the moral deliberation and the particulars of the case were merely incidental to the principles applied.

Charting the development of personalism in Roman Catholic theology since the early twentieth century, Traina identifies its two most enduring ethical aspects: "the person as integral moral actor and as holistic source of moral norms" (1999, p. 108). Thus, the focus of a personalist ethic shifts away from an act-centered morality towards a person-centered morality, that is, the person in relationship with their environment. As Traina indicates, there is no unified personalist school of thought. Rather, conclusions based on personalist criteria take shape variably, based upon differences of anthropologies, perceptions of the mutability (or not) of moral norms, and ecclesial commitments. Thus one of the difficulties of personalism, as noted previously, is its moral ambiguity. Precisely to the extent that morality involves a turn to loving subjects as attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible (Himes, 1989), their personal capacities as moral agents are uncertain. Interestingly, one influential contemporary manifestation of personalism counters this ambiguity with the reinforcement of traditional norms: the "personalist Thomism" of Pope John Paul II.

According to Traina, in the application of personalism developed by John Paul II, personalist criteria serve first to reinforce traditional moral norms as absolute. In particular, personalist criteria bolster the authority of the Magisterium in what Traina terms "magisterial absolutism" (Traina, 1999, p. 119; 1997). Although the Magisterium recognizes personal moral reflection and decision-making of individuals, still it holds that any disagreements with the conclusions of the Magisterium are simply wrong. "Anyone may ponder moral questions, but the church hierarchy is the authoritative critic" (1999, p. 121). A second result of this current personalism is the diminishment of political realities in which individual persons live. While theoretical attention to the personal and particular compensates for what was missing in the casuist tradition, still it oversimplifies the person in the world (1999, pp. 106-114, 119-122).

The methodological difficulty with such an interpretation of personalism is that it adopts historical moral conclusions of the natural law tradition without opening itself appropriately to a natural law methodology. The data informing this personalist stance are not the data of contemporary personal circumstances and realities. In effect, heirarchical personalism bypasses the subject's own situation and capacity for moral reasoning (i.e., practical reason or prudence) in favour of pre-existing moral conclusions. In sum, "By accepting the conclusions of traditional natural law reasoning but refusing to permit natural law's methods to operate freely, hierarchical personalism rejects the rich and complex Thomistic understanding of prudence and thus implicitly also denies the holistic anthropology upon which prudence rests" (Traina, 1999, p. 122).

To better examine the moral exigencies of living this life in the here and now, Traina (1999) turns to the methodological and procedural developments towards social justice of liberation theologies (pp. 114-119). She points out that the application of Thomas Aquinas' thought regarding virtue, justice, and prudence is most pronounced in a liberationist methodology. Linking the virtues of justice and prudence, liberation theologies point out that any promotion of individuals or groups in the development of law (including formulations of natural law) to the detriment of other individuals or groups can be neither prudent nor just (pp. 118-119). Hence, those members of the Church sitting outside of the ecclesiastical hierarchy possess epistemological privilege equal to scholars and clerics. That is, their experiences are equally as informative in the development of moral theologies as the experiences of their more educated and enlightened counterparts. This recognition provides an open entry for women into moral dialogue. Traina notes that both the method and procedure of liberationist theology provide for the voices of the oppressed not only to be articulated but also meaningfully incorporated into Church teaching. Hence, if the historical natural law tradition has not incorporated women's experiences into its formulation of nature and remains static in that formulation, then it is inadequate to address women's moral lives.

In the end, Traina suggests that the critical principles for feminist ethics (1999, pp. 140-168) are pinned upon the three levels on which feminism affects ethics: "method (the theoretical structure of ethical argument), procedure (the practical structure of ethical conversation), and content (the norms or guides the method develops)" (p. 140).[27] At each of these levels of ethical formulations, the primary feminist criterion for morality is the flourishing, or "full-being and welfare" (p. 149), of women. Traina posits that in attending to this criterion the goals of feminism and natural law dovetail "to express adequately the tension between the limitations of being-as-given and the transformative possibilities of the transcending visions that paradoxically are grounded in that finitude" (p. 151). Traina further claims that there exist between natural law and feminist ethics a number of specifically shared interests:

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[27] I discuss these three levels of a feminist natural law ethic in more detail in Chapter 4.

> Both feminist and contemporary natural law ethics embrace the turn to the subject, personalist criteria for moral norms, a creed of individual dignity, a commitment to improving concrete, practical human welfare through systematic change, a strategy for dealing with pluralism, and a mechanism for adapting and transforming principles. (p. 150)

With this statement in mind, I turn now to Traina's specific engagement of feminist ethics with the natural law tradition.

Traina: Feminist Ethics in Conversation with Natural Law

Traina provides what she calls bases for the conversation between feminist ethics and natural law: legitimate self-interest, anthropology, embodiment, virtue, reason, common good, and ethical reflection as a communal endeavour (1999, pp. 150-158). Most pressing of these shared interests for Traina is anthropology (pp. 151-154). Here lies the strongest point of discord between the two schools of thought. Clearly, a natural law ethic will propose some constant in the human subject upon which we can build an ethic. Conversely, a good deal of feminist theory will reject this constant in favour of the radical social construction of subjectivity. Traina, however, distinguishes between the method and content of anthropological statements. She posits that the fundamental method of natural law allows for an ongoing unfolding of our formulation of what is human. In contrast, the content of its formulation will depend upon which data are engaged in reaching conclusions (in this case regarding anthropology). For Traina, the flaw in the traditional formulation of natural law anthropology has more to do with data and content than with method. She proposes that a reconsideration of anthropology in the light of women's (and other oppressed people's) experiences will yield a more fruitful and robust articulation of human anthropology. In essence, she recommends to not throw the methodological baby out with the inadequately formulated conclusions within the historical bathwater. While the method may indeed be in need of some reconsideration, it is not equivalent to its conclusions.

As Traina points out, this reconsideration is no easy task. It would seem that the bases for the dialogue between feminist ethics and natural law ultimately leave us in an ambiguous and tenuous moral environment. Even with regard to the fundamental criterion of flourishing, Traina is deliberately vague:

> There is no single ideal of flourishing, no final and authoritative set of moral principles, no unique path to moral wisdom. The task is rather to discern, in each place and age, which ways of life, guidelines, and ways of moral discernment seem best to respect and promote the integral good of particular people. (1999, p. 160)

This ambiguity suggests that the task will require humility and some dexterity in navigating the independently and mutually fruitful schools of thought at hand. In Traina's estimation, however, the task is a requirement for both groups in order to ensure their development in theoretical and practical realms. In summation, Traina turns to a useful, if lengthy, passage from Crysdale (1995) exploring a revised natural law with attention to the particular, in a Lonerganian vein:

> [A] revised natural law is both possible and imperative. It will recognize the conditioned nature of all of existence, and in particular the statistical laws that contribute to world process. It must further locate itself in an analysis of history that is critical and normative, but that grounds its critical stance in the norms constitutive of human intelligence. It will attend to chemical, biological, and zoological schemes of recurrence as conditioning factors in human existence, both within the human subject and between that subject and her

> environment, without seeking to derive moral norms directly from these natural processes. It will take as an important task, not defining ways in which persons should conform to nature, but clarifying the values implicit in interventions in nature, and stipulating which transformations are ultimately conducive to human flourishing and which are not. (p. 484)

Having established the necessity of a critical synthesis of feminist ethics and natural law, Traina next addresses the question of what such a synthesis might entail. Noting the limitations of both contemporary feminist ethical theory and the Roman Catholic ethical tradition (broadly considered), Traina identifies a number of guidelines regarding the synthesis of the two.

Traina: Guidelines for a Feminist Natural Law Ethic

In advancing her formulation of a natural law ethic Traina articulates a synthesis of feminist thought within the paradigm of natural law. Following are six points I have gleaned from Traina's work regarding this emergent synthesis.

First, natural law's attention to the theological vision of a natural human *telos* must from here on be based upon a "thick" anthropology. That is, it "must encompass all the concrete goods of which genuine, integral human flourishing consists" (1999, p. 306). In a specifically Christian theological context, this requires a "credible connection among Christianity's formal encompassing *telos*, salvation; concrete flourishing; and the moral life" (p. 316). With an assumption of the goodness of the human subject, this is accomplished in the synthesis of feminist, Thomist, and liberationist thought (p. 316). In attending to Thomas's formulation of the virtues (e.g., prudence and justice, as means by which we are able to make wise moral decisions) and liberationist stress on the common good, the flourishing of women becomes more "thickly" articulated (p. 318).

Traina's second guideline pertains to the understanding of embodiment in a feminist natural law ethic (pp. 306-307). She notes that feminist attention to the oppressive dualisms of natural law history (e.g., Coll, 1994; Ruether, 1983) has enhanced our understanding of the fully embodied subject in the world. For Traina, such a formulation of embodiment will of necessity consider sex and gender differences and the moral exigencies stemming from that reality. Further, Traina notes that the Roman Catholic natural law tradition's systematic historical exclusion of women's experiences has rendered it virtually void of an account of women's bodies. Noting the confluence of both Thomas's and contemporary feminist ethics' (e.g., Cahill, 1996; Gudorf, 1994) attention to the embodied subject in their particular context, Traina states that an adequate feminist natural law must also attend to the goodness of the body, in particular the female body, in its ethical formulation.

Third, Traina focuses on the proportionalist penchant for either/or decision-making (e.g., McCormick, 1978; Salzman, 2003). Here she points out that a feminist recognition of and tolerance for the ambiguity of possibilities in moral decision-making enhances the revisionist attention to the particular (Traina, 1999, p. 307). Rather than limiting our moral scope to discrete problems in discrete circumstances, Traina suggests that attention to the broad contexts of our moral dilemmas, as has been a focus of feminist ethics, would enhance natural law. This thought leads helpfully into the fourth point I identify in Traina's guidelines: the need for the integral person's particularity to be dynamically intertwined with his/her context.[28] She notes that both the Thomistic and revisionist natural law proponents' limited (if not non-existent) dialogue with oppressed and marginalized groups left those persons with diminished representation in the development of moral theology. This exclusion in turn limited the universal status of natural law formulations and its effectiveness in ethical thought (pp. 308-309).

Traina's fifth point in this critical synthesis addresses the enhancement of feminist ethical theory with natural law's attention to norms. Traina proposes that feminism's general aversion to articulating norms stems from the historical oppression of women (and others) by the articulation of "universal" norms by specific and limited groups, to the detriment of women's flourishing. She also points out, however, that feminist ethics does not so much lack principles, as it lacks a connected articulation of them (1999, pp. 309-310). For Traina, the articulation and re-articulation of ethical claims in concrete circumstances will indeed provide for a feminist gleaning and assertion of norms. The method that she proposes is best suited to this task is casuistry. Within the casuist paradigm there is room to articulate tentative norms that arise from ongoing consideration of particular, concrete circumstances (p. 317).[29]

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[28] Many liberation feminist theologians working from a global perspective (corresponding with a broader post-colonial focus in contemporary scholarship) have critiqued liberal feminisms for the assumption of sameness in women. More recent feminist scholarship points out the numerous differences among women within the matrix of sexual difference, race, socio-economic status, geographical location, ability, etc. See, for example, Kwok, 2005 & 1992 and Isasi-Diaz, 1993.

Finally, Traina suggests that the historical natural law tradition pays little critical attention, even in the liberationist camp, to gender differences and their concomitant ethical requirements (1999, pp. 310-312). To address the injustices wrought upon women (and others) effectively in the light of difference, she suggests that whitewashing the oppression under the guise of "sinful social constructions" obliterates the possibility of addressing and redressing the injustices. Rather, social justice depends upon clear and critical affirmation of difference and a commitment to exercising justice in its presence. Recognizing the delicate discussion required between these two ethical theories, Traina addresses the specific requirements for its successful outcome:

> Feminist critical analysis trades on its unique ability to distinguish pure cultural constructions from either just or oppressive cultural interpretations of ineradicable human difference and on its superior capacity to deal justly with difference. Feminism's basic claim is not, therefore, essentialist, romantic, or simplistically naturalist. Feminism need not argue that more divides men and women than unites them; that men and women complement each other or have mutually exclusive skills; that sexual characteristics categorically exclude anyone from just wages, a standard education, or positions of responsibility; or that one sex is superior to another. But it must argue

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[29] To this end, Margaret Farley (2006) proposes "norms for just sex" in her recent *Just Love: A Framework for Sexual Ethics* (pp. 216-232). Although the nuance of her discussion is diminished in this brief note, still the articulation of her norms is quite helpful. She proposes two norms based specifically on autonomy, from within a principle-based ethic, four norms based upon a relational ethic, and one norm based upon a social ethic. The norms are: 1) Do No Unjust Harm; 2) Free Consent (autonomy-based); 3) Mutuality; 4) Equality; 5) Commitment; 6) Fruitfulness (relationally-based); and 7) Social Justice (socially-based). Although Farley recognizes the precariousness of outlining norms for sexual relationships and expression and the delicacy required in their application, still she proceeds. For "if sexuality is to be creative and not destructive in personal and social relationships, then there is no substitute for discerning ever more carefully the norms whereby it will be just" (2006, p. 232).

> that this almost universal difference in embodied existence is likely to yield differences in experience that affect moral reflection and that these must be explored critically. This is the uniquely important frontier between natural law and feminist thought. It points… to issues crucial to the success of both. (p. 312)

In her identification of guidelines for the synthesis of feminist ethics and natural law ethics, Traina treads the precarious but fruitful path between concrete human experience and universal statements about the human. In particular, she undertakes the groundwork for the articulation of an ethics that meets the exigencies both of feminist attention to the concrete and natural law attention to the universal. She concludes:

> Natural law thus models elements that any viable, constructive feminist theological ethic must also possess: above all, an overarching telos, as well as an inductive method of matching cases and principles; an eschatology and a developmental virtue theory that connect individual and communal ends at both the immediate and ultimate levels; a tradition of social analysis; an argument for self-preservation; and an integral rather than ambivalent reading of human embodiment. But these elements also provide a constructive Christian feminism the rudiments of a coherent theological ethic. (1999, p. 319)

Still recognizing the difficulty of making universal claims in a pluralistic world, Traina proposes "revisable universals"[30] as a means of addressing norms (1999, pp. 320-322). For her, this phrase inherently expresses openness to reconsideration of universals in the light of thoughtful criticisms. Yet she does not say that universal claims are impossible. Rather, she states that the claims we make to universality must be made "with earnest humility" (p. 320). They are strong hypotheses that we must propose with self-conscious awareness of our own particularity in the world. Thus

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[30] Not unlike the "strategic essentials" articulated by Jones (2000) and Teevan (2003).

Traina concludes that it is indeed possible to "live in the tension between prophecy and pluralism" (p. 320). A broad cultural respect for difference opens the door for a denominational ethic that can engage fruitfully with other ethics without the façade of neutrality; we can dialogue among a plurality of experiences (pp. 321-322).

Summary

In this chapter I present the theological context within which I work. Roman Catholic theology has a rich history of natural law theory that continues to develop in contemporary theological discourse. My exploration of Thomas Aquinas' benchmark formulation of natural law, and the contemporary natural law formulations of the Basic Goods and the Revisionist schools of thought provides a theoretical framework for discussion of ethical questions. To that end I also consider contemporary sexual theologies of the body and feminist formulations of sexual theology. Feminist theological and theoretical discourses provide a necessary correction to historical formulations of human sexuality and morality, and further invite consideration of sexualities previously excluded from these discourses.

To attend adequately to the realities of adolescent girls and the need for a sexual ethic that accounts for them and their experiences, the feminist natural law theoretical framework formulated by Cristina Traina emerges as the best theoretical option for my project. Its methodological, procedural, and substantial flexibility allow for systematic consideration of a variety of data in constructing an adequate sexual ethic.

It is open to ongoing critique and revision in its dynamic evolution, yet it is able to facilitate the proposal of tentative universals and norms in its engagement with the data. To propose such an ethic, however, requires exploration of contemporary empirical realities with regard to sex, sexuality, and sexual expression. In Chapter Three I undertake such an exploration: I review data regarding the contemporary realities of adolescent females.

CHAPTER 3 - ADOLESCENT FEMALES IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT: SEX, GENDER, AND DEVELOPMENT

Following the construction of a feminist natural law foundation for a sexual theology accounting for adolescent females, I now turn my attention to the empirical data with which such an ethic will be constructed. I choose explicitly to address adolescent females and sexuality because theirs is a silent voice in the history of sexual theology. The irony of this silence lies in the fact that a good deal of our energy within Christian churches, with regard to sexual morality, is directed at adolescents: what they ought to do, what they ought not to do. Theologians must, I believe, incorporate empirical evidence into our theological construction of human sexuality, so that we might better address young people and adults alike. In keeping with the methodology and procedural criteria of a feminist natural law theory, we must incorporate these voices into our sexual theologies.

In this chapter I outline some of the salient aspects of adolescent development that might contribute to an adequate sexual theology. These aspects include, for example, gender development, hetero-normativity, moral development, identity development, and physical development (including hormonal and neural triggers), with a specific focus on menarche. This focus identifies ways in which initiation into female sexuality is shaped by Western social forces such as advertising and sexism. This account of adolescent female development is not an exhaustive account of adolescent females' sexual realities. It does, however, provide sufficient substance to embark on a synthesis of these data within a feminist natural law theory, and to construct an adequate ethic for adolescent female sexualities. Because contemporary adolescent development is fraught with the ambivalence of competing social messages, identity formation, and personal realities, the construction of such a sexual ethic requires some delicate attention to both the personal and the social.

One significant social factor in the lives of contemporary adolescent females is the moral voices emanating from various Christian churches. Certainly the authoritative voice of the Roman Catholic Church provides much food for thought. When I consider adolescent female sexuality in the context of Roman Catholic sexual theology I find myself walking a rather sparsely trodden path. In the history and tradition of Roman Catholic teaching and discussion, theologians have generally assumed adulthood in both our audiences and our subjects. Very little of our theological substance has incorporated in its formulation empirical evidence beyond the anecdotal. Further, for the vast majority of official magisterial formulations, females' realities are absent. This absence is no more obvious and true than in the area of sexual theologies. Not only is there a dearth of reflection on developmental realities in human sexualities, but so too is there a dearth of reflection on female personal, social, and spiritual realities.

In our contemporary context, such inattention to adolescent females' realities will not do. To privilege girls' sexual realities in the construction of a sexual theology is to attend to the stories, experiences, and perceptions of a largely silent population of the

Roman Catholic Church. Further, to address empirical evidence accounting for the lives of diverse girls in contemporary Western societies is to attend intelligently, reasonably, responsibly, and lovingly to historically marginalized voices. As an adult Roman Catholic female, I cannot help but undertake this work in the light of my own adolescence. While fashion, technology, society, and even theological discourse have changed, Roman Catholic teachings have not; these teachings remain in essence the same today as they were in my own adolescence, despite monumental growth in our understanding of human sexuality, gender, and development.

Beyond the reality that I was once a Roman Catholic adolescent female myself, I choose to explore adolescent girls' experiential accounts of sexuality because of the psychological counseling work I do with adolescent females. While counseling adolescent girls I observe among many of them a decided ambivalence towards not only sex and sexuality, but also towards themselves as sexual persons. Despite the continual barrage of sexual messages and images they face in their immediate environments, it often seems that girls have limited meaningful discussions of sexuality and few concrete values or norms to guide them in their decision-making.[1] As a theologian, I recognize that theological discourse about sexuality does not itself engage adolescent realities. Concluding that the realities of adolescent sexualities are generally far removed from the construction of theological sexual ethics, I choose to engage existing empirical data as a means of evaluating the appropriateness of current theologies of sexuality for adolescent female flourishing.

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[1] Witness the spate of print magazines (with their on-line equivalents) aimed at adolescent females: *teenvogue* (www.teenvogue.com), *GL/Girls' Life* (www.girlslife.com), *seventeen* (www.seventeen.com), *COSMOgirl!* (www.cosmogirl.com), *ELLEgirl* (www.ellegirl.com), *teen* (www.teenmag.com), *teenpeople* (www.teenpeople.com), *YM* (www.ym.com). These magazines tend to be derivatives of adult fashion magazines, reformatted with information deemed appropriate for adolescents. Teen-focused magazines, however, generally feature advertising, content, and product endorsement similar to adult magazines. Teen magazines also tend to focus on fashion, dating (boys), body size, and sex. In contrast to fashion magazines, there are some adolescent-focused magazines that attempt to counter the cultural focus on appearance and boys with attention to contemporary issues (e.g., elections), broader life questions (e.g., choosing universities), and strong female role-models (as opposed to fashion models): *shameless* (www.shamelessmag.com), *teen voices* (www.teenvoices.com).

In this chapter I undertake an exploration of adolescent females' realities with regard to development, sex and gender, sexuality, and relationship in the light of current empirical data. I explore primarily psychological (both theoretical and empirical) studies of adolescent females' experiences and perceptions in contemporary Western societies as a means of attending to their voices, and of constructing a sexual theology from the dialogue between those voices and the voices of Roman Catholic theology. I begin the discussion by exploring theoretical accounts of factors contributing to adolescent development.

Developmental Factors in Adolescence

Adolescence itself is generally understood to be "a prolonged transition period between childhood and adulthood that prepares the young person for occupation, marriage, and mature social roles" (Muuss, 1996, p. 366). Although this transition is biologically a universal experience among males and females, still the cultural context seems to dictate what persons make of it. Various theories account for aspects of this transition (e.g., psychoanalytic, anthropological, cognitive-developmental, and social theories) and reflect specific concerns relevant to adolescent development (e.g., individuation into adulthood, cultural normativity, development of cognitive capacities, and social integration, respectively). For the purposes of this work, I understand adolescence as a time of multi-faceted transition during which an individual experiences physical, cognitive, affective, relational, and social development.[2] The individual and social contexts of the person contribute to his or her experience of adolescence, and are woven inextricably within her or his own physical reality. Development does not hinge solely on one factor (e.g., genetic inheritance, nurturing, or social support) but on the interaction of these mysterious variables in the life of each unique person.

As a salient reality in the human experience, development is largely unaccounted for in traditional theological discourse around sexuality. In the realm of psychological theory and practice, accounts of human development offer insight into how we interact as persons over the lifespan. In addressing the different realms of development, we obtain insight into how persons differ from infancy through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In turn, these insights provide data that can inform theological and ethical reflections regarding sexuality. To approach the reality of adolescent development by explicit attention to the body, the realms that I address are biological/physical development in relation to sex, gender, socialization, and identity, and neurological development. While for the purposes of clarity I discuss these realms as discrete areas of human development, the reality of the interaction of the various aspects of development in the lives of actual persons is far more complex and intertwined than it is discrete. No one aspect of development is untouched by the others and so renders this conceptualization merely that, a conceptualization. Further, I acknowledge that the plethora of theoretical and empirical data around human development is not adequately represented here. Some theories and studies are left out, and necessarily my own bias colours my choices, perceptions, and interpretations of the data. With these caveats in mind, I turn to consider the roles of gender and identity development in adolescence.

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[2] I also understand adolescence from my own situation as a Western adult female academic; this recognition situates my limitations in undertaking this project.

Identity, Gender, and Gender Development Theory

Gender Development Theory

To set out on this exploration of adolescent development with an account of gender development is to acknowledge that I understand gender construction to be a crucial aspect of contemporary human experience. This social reality manages to affect us, for the most part, unawares and yet with profound significance over our developmental lives. I thus believe a brief account of gender development provides a context within which adolescent development is better understood. Gender development theory, in particular, provides a helpful introduction to adolescent girls' realities and an account of the various aspects and manifestations of gender among adolescents.

One particular theory of gender development that attempts to integrate multiple factors is the Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bussey and Bandura (1999). In their account, Bussey and Bandura posit that a gender development theory not accounting for multiple factors in adolescent development is insufficient. Following consideration of psychoanalytic, cognitive-developmental, gender schema, biological, and sociological theories regarding the development of gender, Bussey and Bandura propose social cognitive theory as an integrative theory that accounts for a variety of human capacities (i.e., capacities for symbolization, observational learning, self-regulation, reflection, and information processing) (1999, p. 683f). They further note, however, that these potentialities are not necessarily behavioural dictates. Rather, we are prone to change and malleability over time in our gender identification, understanding, and manifestation (p. 684). Social cognitive theory thus states: "gender development is neither totally shaped and regulated by environmental forces nor by socially non-situated intrapsychic processes. Rather, gender development is explained in terms of triadic reciprocal causation" (p. 684). That is, personal, behavioural, and environmental factors interact in persons' lives to facilitate fluid gender development.[3]

Bussey and Bandura (1999) assume that the category of sex (i.e., female and male, primarily) sets each person on a multifaceted course of gender development that takes place via numerous influences (e.g., modeling of gender by others, interpreting others' responses to our own gendered behaviours, and direct learning from others about gender conceptualizations) (pp. 685- 689). We learn from others' behaviours and teaching what constitutes "appropriate" gender conduct, and further by how they respond to our own behaviours. They also propose that gender conduct and role behaviour is closely regulated by social sanctions, self-sanctions, and individual and collected perceptions of self-efficacy according to gender (pp. 689-694). For example, a boy might be sanctioned for wearing nail polish because males do not wear nail polish. And a girl might perceive herself as less able to undertake welding as a profession because females do not do heavy manual labour.[4] Hence males and females are socialized in multiple ways towards roles and behaviours stereotypically attributed to each of the sexes.

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[3] While they note the biological realities of sex differentiation, Bussey and Bandura offer no account of whether or not these biological factors have any impact upon gender development beyond social construction. That is, do sex differences (i.e., physical bodies) have some meaning in the human gendered experience, or are they merely interpreted as gendered in some social construction? This question harkens back to Butler's post-structuralist account of sex and gender, whereby she claims that sex is discursively constructed and has no intrinsic meaning outside of its social context.

In their social cognitive analysis of gender role development and functioning, Bussey and Bandura (1999, pp. 694-704) identify a number of influences at work in the development of gender over the course of a lifespan: pre-gender identity regulation of gender conduct (i.e., gender regulation of children prior to their own recognition of gender); self-categorization and acquisition of gender role knowledge (i.e., recognition of personal sex category and concomitant gender role prescriptions); movement from social sanctions to self-sanctions (i.e., the internalization of social prescriptions regarding gender); movement from gender categorization to gender role learning (i.e., moving from the understanding of one's sex category to the "appropriate" performance of prescribed gender roles); parental impact on subsequent gender development; impact of peers on gender development; media representations of gender roles; impact of educational practices on gender development (i.e., educational practices that often reveal a hidden gender curriculum); gendered practices of occupational systems (i.e., constructs of employment for females and males); and interdependence of gender socializing sub-systems (i.e., ways in which the above influences work in concert to create and reinforce gender identification, roles, behaviours, and structures).

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[4] An interesting example of policy aimed at rectifying negative socialization and perceived self-efficacy among females is the passing of the Title IX Education Amendments of 1972 in the United States (Title 20 U.S.C. Sections 1681-1688). Title IX states with regard to sexual discrimination that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Section 1681 (a), United States Department of Labor, 1972). In effect, Title IX served to create an atmosphere in schools whereby females have equitable access to sporting (and other) programs formerly inaccessible to them because of preferential socialization of those activities towards males.

Gender development theory is an important contribution to our understanding of the experiences of males and females within particular contexts, as witnessed in Egan and Perry's (2001) "multidimensional analysis" of gender identity regarding psychosocial adjustment. They found that, among both boys and girls, the more pressure adolescents felt for gender conformity, and the more they perceived themselves as gender non-conforming, the lower their psychosocial adjustment to gender identity. And although both males and females reported felt pressure to adopt gender-typed roles and behaviours (i.e., feminine for females and masculine for males), females fared worse in terms of psychosocial adjustment to gender a-typicality. Egan and Perry (2001) surmised two reasons for this disparity in adjustment: 1) girls are more likely to internalize the perceptions of others regarding appropriate gender type and 2) male-typed traits, occupations, and academic pursuits are generally more highly valued socially than female-typed traits.

> If felt pressure causes children to veer away from cross-sex activities and traits, then girls who are high in felt pressure will be discouraged from developing the instrumental male-typed competencies that bring prestige and promote effectual coping. For boys, on the other hand, felt pressure is more likely to support than to undermine the acquisition of socially valued and adaptive male-typed characteristics.

> [G]irls who perceive themselves to be competent in male-typed activities and agentic traits are advantaged in terms of self-esteem yet are disliked by female peers. This contradiction may create conflict for girls. (p. 460)

It is therefore quite possible that the double bind in which girls find themselves may be mitigated by social reconsideration of gender types, roles, and behaviours. Indeed, as Smith and Leaper (2005) point out, gender development is highly socialized and contextual; various social contexts affect the ways in which adolescents perceive their gender typicality. They found social and peer acceptance of gender non-conforming adolescents mediated their own self-worth. Avoiding the contradiction indicated above by Egan and Perry (2001), the adolescents in Smith and Leaper's study who were not ostracized by their peers for gender atypical manifestations adjusted much better to their own gender identity.

With specific regard for females dealing with conventional constructions of femininity, a study by Tolman, Impett, Tracy, and Michael (2006) revealed strong evidence that "early adolescent girls who internalize conventional femininity ideologies, particularly regarding body objectification, have lower self-esteem and higher depressed mood" (p. 91). Thus, when girls embrace social constructions of gender typicality, they are prone to mental health issues. Generally, contemporary Western social constructions of femininity embody gender prescriptions that may themselves be harmful to girls and women; the negotiation of gender development and identity is somewhat precarious business.

As Basow (2006) points out, the social context of gender development weighs heavily in the psychological well-being of adolescent females. Basow defines gender as a socially-constructed phenomenon and gender identity as rather more fluid and malleable than fixed and static. She notes that contemporary studies seem to indicate that "those individuals who possess both the stereotypical masculine traits of instrumentality and assertiveness, as well as the stereotypical feminine traits of nurturance and expressiveness (that is, gender aschematic individuals), seem to have the most behavioral flexibility in both work and interpersonal relationships" (p. 247). Basow proposes that by broadening our notions of gender we could create a society in which all persons "can truly flourish and achieve their maximal psychological health" (p. 250).

Tolman, Striepe, and Harmon (2003) take gender identity and development more explicitly into the construction of a model of adolescent sexual health. Their contention is that previous models of adolescent sexual health have not sufficiently explored the role of gender (as a social construction) in factors pertaining to the sexual health of both males and females. Their study included both females and males in its consideration not just of the negative effects of adolescent sexual behaviours (e.g., unplanned pregnancy, STIs, abuse), but also of positive manifestations of adolescent sexuality. Their application of a "web of theories" (i.e., a multidimensional theoretical framework including feminist theory and its critique of compulsory heterosexuality and social injustices regarding gender; social construction theory and phenomenology; relational theory regarding adolescent development; and ecological development theory [pp. 7-9]) and a narrative analysis approach to their Listening Guide strategy yielded what they term a theory of "gender complementarity" (p. 10).[5]

> Gender complementarity is meant as a meaningful alternative to arguments about gender difference versus sameness. It means that ideologies of masculinity and femininity, which infuse constructions of adolescent male and female sexuality, fit together to reproduce particular and limited forms of sexuality that are deemed to be "normal", all in the service of reproducing and sustaining compulsory heterosexuality. (p. 10)

They conclude that, to attend appropriately to the sexual health needs of adolescents (both in their positive and negative manifestations), we must attend explicitly to socially constructed notions of gender that inhibit or impede their capacity to achieve sexual health. For girls, this attention includes noting social barriers to their acknowledgement of "sexual desire, feeling sexually empowered and having access to contraception and condoms", all "'punishable offences' under compulsory heterosexuality" (Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003, p. 11). For boys, this attention includes the option of experiencing and expressing emotions with regard to sex and sexuality, support to choose not to objectify females and sex, and access to role models who do not promote sexuality as a means of predation (p. 11). In their exploration of the impact of gender identity and development on adolescent sexual health, Tolman, Striepe, and Harmon recognize the complex interaction of multiple influences in gendered models of adolescent sexual health.

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[5] It seems unlikely that Tolman, Striepe, and Harmon (2003) are aware of the official Roman Catholic understanding of "gender complementarity" in its own formulation of theological anthropology and concomitant sex and gender discussions. I suspect Tolman et al would not favour the notion of "gender complementarity" as it has been developed in Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body and subsequent official Church teachings.

Theories attentive to sex and gender difference are supported by significant data suggesting that, in particular, the sexual experiences of adolescent males and females differ substantially, as do their perceptions of these experiences (Brooks-Gunn, 1992; Fine, 1998; Guggino & Ponzetti, 1997; Moreau-Gruet, Ferron, Jeannin, & Dubois-Arber, 1996; Phillips, 2000; Tolman, 2002a & 2002b). Indeed, girls seem both to expect and to have more negative experiences than do boys in the expression of their sexuality (Silverman, Raj, & Clements, 2004; Thompson, 1990) and also seem to interpret their sexual experiences more negatively than do boys (Guggino & Ponzetti, 1997; Thompson, 1990). This information is crucial to understanding not only the nature of adolescent girls' sexualities but also their sexual experiences.

Hetero-normativity

Implicit in the discussions I present above is a hetero-normative sexuality. Western society tends to assume heterosexuality in its consideration of sex and sexuality, and further assumes sex categories of male and female. While the latter assumption is an interesting issue to explore (i.e., the relative social invisibility of trans-sexuality, inter-sexuality, or trans-gender, for example) the scope of this project does not allow its consideration in depth. Rather, I turn to the assumption of heterosexuality and its related issues. First, this assumption renders invisible, and to a certain extent dangerous, the possibility and reality of other sexualities among adolescent girls. Lesbian and bisexual girls must navigate heterosexual social constructions to remain safe in their sexual identity and expression (Tolman, 2002a).

Clearly such navigation is nothing new in modern Western culture. What is new, however, is the recognition that such an assumption might have a negative impact upon non-heterosexual girls. Despite the current culture of lesbian chic in the media, the reality for females is less romantic (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). Tolman (2002a) notes Adrienne Rich's identification of *compulsory heterosexuality* as a Western social construction that effectively establishes heterosexuality as natural and renders other sexualities non-natural (pp. 16-19). This construction creates a normative expectation for heterosexual desire and expression that ignores, or worse, vilifies, other sexualities, forcing them into hiding (Tolman, 2002a).

Further, this expectation does little to explore, beyond heterosexual coitus, what sexual expression might include. Take for example discussion in the media about the rise in oral sex among teens (e.g., Lewin, 1997). Remez (2000) points out that there exists little current reliable research to substantiate the media reports. She further notes that the understanding of oral sex as either "sex" or "abstinence" is unclear among both adolescents and researchers. Two points are important here: first, that the discussion of oral sex is a novelty in addressing questions of sexual behaviour; and second, that the current discussion of oral sex has primarily to do with girls performing fellatio on boys. Aside from a passing citation from Deborah Tolman in Remez's article (2000, p. 299), cunnilingus hardly features in the discussion. And, as Alterman (1999) wryly points out in his commentary on the media's fixation with oral sex and teens, girls are considered "at risk" in this behaviour, not boys. Further, the question of what constitutes sexual behaviour seems most contentious with regard to heterosexual interaction: Remez (2000) cites an informal study that suggests that gay men and women tend to "label a greater number of activities as 'sex'" than their heterosexual counterparts (p. 301). Clearly, sex is not just penile-vaginal penetration.

The example above suggests that male hetero-normative sexual construction practically renders female (and non-heterosexual) sexuality insignificant. Studies suggest that girls who masturbate, experience childhood sexual play, and/or are raised hearing about positive sexual experiences from their mothers (or other significant adult females) are more likely to experience sexual pleasure and make healthy sexual choices. Still, we find little discussion of sexual expression of this nature (Thompson, 1990). Perhaps female sexual pleasure conjures up notions of deviance and moral laxity, which in turn renders it unsavoury for social consideration.

Second, the hetero-normative assumption has created a field of data that focuses on the possible negative outcomes of adolescent heterosexual behaviours (Bay-Cheng, 2003). In particular, the data point to negative outcomes for girls: violence, unintended and/or unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, social labeling, religious condemnation, and negative personal affect. (See for example: Biddlecom, 2004; Boyce, Doherty, Fortin, & Mackinnon, 2003; Oswalt, Cameron, & Koob, 2005; and Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin, 1999.)[6] It is perhaps because our scholarship focuses on adolescent sexual behaviours and their consequences as negative, that discussions of the positive possibilities stemming from sexual interaction go underground (Fine, 1988). Indeed, Tolman's (2002a, 2002b) exploration of adolescent girls' sexual desire points to the confusion girls face when positively desiring and experiencing their own sexuality in a social context of negative evaluation. Such ambivalence between personal experience and social expectation can lead to dissociation from the body, denial or repression of sexuality, vulnerability in sexual situations, or myriad negative sexual experiences. Interestingly, Thompson (1990) found that girls most comfortable with and aware of their own sexuality (physically, psychologically, emotionally) were best able to make positive sexual choices for themselves (e.g., abstinence, protected intercourse, delayed intercourse, sexual activity expressing their sexual orientation).

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[6] Judith Levine (2000) offers a journalistic account of how our negative social construction of sex and sexuality as it pertains to children and adolescents, and the ensuing abstinence-only education policies at various levels of government within the United States, might in fact be more harmful to minors than helpful.

Third, hetero-normativity developed within a patriarchal society has perpetuated the structure of male privilege as regards sexuality. While some researchers focus on the negative outcomes of sexual behaviour, they also assume that females must take responsibility for avoiding such outcomes. For instance, they question female sexual assertiveness as a means of self-protection: are females assertive enough (Rickert, Sanghvi, & Wiemann, 2002)? It is, of course, important that adolescent girls and adult women possess a sense of agency regarding their own sexuality. It is naïve, however, to suggest that girls and women alone can effect such agency. Rather, the complex web of factors woven within sexual choices points to the social reality of patriarchal hetero-normativity: females do not independently control their sexual experiences (Abma, Driscoll, & Moore, 1998).

Gender, Moral Development, and Voice

The sexed and gendered realities of adolescent girls have long been considered problematic in Western culture. The formulation of gender roles and realities based upon a hetero-normative sexual social construction create problematic choices for adolescent girls and adult women. In particular, this social matrix confounds efforts at moral decision-making. This reality is the basis of Carol Gilligan's application of the notion of gender in the lives of adolescent girls and women in her highly influential work (1993/1982). Gilligan's early work explored the ways in which gender/sex influenced both the theory and practice of moral development. Her exploration of female development stood her in contrast both with Lawrence Kohlberg, her mentor, and Jean Piaget. Based upon his theory of cognitive development, Piaget posited moral autonomy, characteristic of adolescence, as the highest stage of moral development. Kohlberg developed Piaget's cognitive development theory further to construct a theory of moral development. For Kohlberg, the most morally developed person would make decisions based upon universal principles that transcend (although might still be congruent with) the law (Muuss, 1996, pp. 176-185). Gilligan noted that the theories proposed by both Piaget and Kohlberg were predicated on a male construction of justice in moral decision-making, which omitted females' moral constructs.[7] In effect, males were considered higher-level moral decision-makers than females.

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[7] Because Kohlberg's subjects were all male, a number of biases coloured his work. First, there was a philosophical bias of the equation of "male" with "human" and, second, there was a practical bias to the experiences and perceptions of males.

Gilligan countered Kohlberg's theory of what she termed justice-oriented moral development with what she identified as a decidedly female moral construct: an ethic of care and relationship (Gilligan, 1993/1982). Gilligan thus launched a diverse and contentious theoretical discussion of difference in development (moral or otherwise) and experience, and the extent to which these differences are affected by social gender construction.[8] She posited that, due to social constructions of gender-appropriate roles for males and females, moral orientations developed in support of the gendered realities of males and females: females were socialized for relationship, nurturance, and care; males were socialized for autonomy, individualism, and justice.

In the twenty-five years since the initial publication of her work, Gilligan's theory has been tested empirically. Her assertion that justice and care are two modes of moral reasoning has found general acceptance; however, her assertion that these two moral orientations are strongly associated with socialized gender seem statistically unsupported in empirical studies (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). The importance of her work, however, has not diminished. As Hyde and Jaffee (2000) point out, perhaps the most striking contribution of Gilligan's work regarding moral orientation is that "if psychological theories of human development intend to represent lived experience, then they must be constructed with the diversity of such experience in mind" (p. 721), including gender and sex differences.

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[8] Seyla Benhabib (1987) offers a succinct account of Kohlberg's response to Gilligan's critique of his work, and an interesting theoretical exploration of the place of feminist theory in the development of moral philosophy in Western thought.

In Gilligan's later work (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), she and colleague Lyn Mikel Brown move towards a discussion of women's psychology and girls' development and away from the specific discussion of moral development. Following a four-year study of almost one hundred girls (primarily white and socio-economically advantaged) between the ages of seven and eighteen, Brown and Gilligan report a loss of voice and relationship during female adolescence: "girls struggle to stay in connection with themselves and with others, to voice their feelings and thoughts and experiences in relationships" (p. 4). Brown and Gilligan (1992) observed that, in the course of moving from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood, females' lives became highly politicized, thus directing the girls away from their authentic selves into socially acceptable selves as females.

Harter et al.'s (1998) study investigated the claims of loss of voice among adolescent females and males and whether such a loss of voice, if identifiable, was indeed global or context specific. They found that reported loss of voice in adolescence showed no particular gender bias. Further, they noted that there were mitigating factors around lack of voice and expression that rendered it rather more contextual than global. In particular, they found that support for expression of voice from others, gender orientation (i.e., stereotypically masculine or feminine) in private or public contexts, and relational context were all factors mitigating the adolescents' perceived level of voice.

Furthermore, Harter et al. "documented the strong relationship between level of voice and relational self-worth within each interpersonal context" (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998, p. 900). If in a particular context an individual reported a low level of voice, he or she correspondingly reported a low level of self-worth. Although the researchers noted an incomplete understanding of the directionality of the relationship between these two factors, they proposed that the impact of the factors is reciprocal. At any rate, Harter et al.'s perceptions that loss of voice is a developmental and functional liability for adolescents correlate with Gilligan's similar perceptions specifically regarding adolescent females. In particular, Harter et al. point to the role that loss and/or lack of voice plays in the suppression of the authentic self and individual identity.

Who Am I? Self-Identity

Harter's own extensive work on self and identity explores and documents the implications of adolescent development on perceptions of self (Harter, 2003 & 1999). After pointing out the differences between the terms "self-representations" (i.e., how one describes oneself) and "self-evaluations" (i.e., references to one's positive or negative attributes), Harter further notes the important differentiation between global self-evaluations (i.e., "self-esteem") and domain-specific self-evaluations (i.e., "self-concept") (2003, pp. 611-612). For Harter, the construction of self is both a cognitive and a social process, whereby over the developmental life-span we become (under normal circumstances) more able to integrate both the subjective and objective perceptions of the self into a coherent whole. Important for our purposes is Harter's assertion that it is not until late adolescence/early adulthood that the potential to construct a coherent understanding of self emerges. Indeed, in the context of adolescence itself, Harter distinguishes among stages and capacities of adolescence: early adolescence (approximately 12-14 years: potential for differentiation of abstract characteristics of the self, with little awareness of seeming contradictions, e.g., intelligence vs. airhead); middle adolescence (approximately 15-16: potential for "mapping" abstract characteristics of the self, with awareness of seeming contradictions, which causes "considerable intrapsychic conflict, confusion, and distress" [Harter, 2003, p. 622]); and late adolescence (potential for both mapping and interco-ordinating single abstractions to construct an integrated understanding of self, with awareness and acceptance of seeming contradictions) (Harter, 2003, pp. 622-624; see also Harter, 1999).

The importance of the above developmental tasks for Harter lies in each individual's success in meeting the challenges along the developmental path, and her or his functional self-perceptions and self-evaluations concomitant to successes or failures. With regard to the over-arching well-being of each individual, Harter proposes that self-evaluations are important aspects of mental health (e.g., self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation). Further, the critical factors affecting self-evaluation and resulting self-esteem are two-fold:

1) The individual's perceived competence in domains that he or she also perceives to be important (e.g., high marks and scholastic achievement). Harter's (2003) findings suggest that if an individual perceives him or herself to be unsuccessful in an

important domain (as opposed to one considered unimportant to him or her), that individual will manifest lower self-esteem than others who perceive themselves as successful in similarly perceived domains of importance. In her studies Harter has found that in a situation where one's self-perception in an important domain is low, then one's global self-perception also suffers. Hence, low self-esteem contributes to global identity of the individual and perceived capacity for success.

2) The individual's perceived support from others that she or he deems important in a specific domain. Harter notes that both children and adolescents incorporate significant others' appraisals of them into their own perception of self-worth, thus rendering appropriate positive appraisal crucial in their construction of positive self-worth.[9] Construction of self-identity is thus a developmental cognitive and social task that is a cornerstone for the attainment of adult capacities in personal and social functioning. Along with the development of gender and voice, adolescent female identity development in the construction of self constitutes a crucial aspect of self-perception and self-esteem. Such construction obviously takes place within a particular context for each individual person, yet is more generally located within each person's broader setting. One general reality common to adolescents is biological/physical development, particularly located within specific social contexts. I now turn to address female adolescent pubertal development (i.e., biological/physical) and, in specific, the experience of menarche and its concomitant realities.

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[9] Interestingly, Harter also notes the possible liabilities associated with exceedingly high self-esteem for some individuals. When combined with narcissistic tendencies, low empathy for others, and high sensitivity to negative evaluation, these individuals are prone to react violently to threats to their own egos (Harter, 2003, pp. 633-634).

Biological/Physical Development in Relation to Sex, Gender, and Socialization

Likely the most obvious facet of development in adolescence is biological/physical development; for both females and males, the advent of adolescence is marked by the onset of puberty (Dahl, 2004; Rathus et al, 2005). Hormonal and neural triggers set in motion the physical maturation of the individual, starting from approximately eight and nine years of age, for females and males respectively. The recognition of immense biological changes brought about by hormonal triggers led early biogenetic theorist G. Stanley Hall to posit adolescence as a universal time of storm and stress (*Sturm und Drang).* "Hall assumed that development is brought about by physiological changes. He further assumed that these physiological factors are genetically determined, that internal maturational forces predominantly control and direct development, growth, and behavior. There was little room in this theory for the influence of environmental forces" (Muuss, pp. 15-16). With a nod to the sporadic and extreme mood fluctuations of some adolescents, along with their propensity towards idealism, passion, and social revolution, Hall perceived genetic influence as the predominant factor in a turbulent adolescent transition.

Hall's theory has met with some opposition. Given the evolution of psychological understanding of adolescent development, the complexities beyond biology (e.g., cognition, or socialization) pose complications for Hall's theory. In his reconsideration of Hall's theory, Arnett (1999) has fleshed out some of the research pointing to the inadequacies of Hall's account of adolescence. Arnett concludes that, although there are undeniable biological factors in adolescent development, these factors work in concert with other developmental factors throughout adolescence. Thus, while adolescent storm and stress may indeed be a reality for some adolescents, it is neither necessarily universal, nor mutually exclusive from a time of "exuberant growth" (Arnett, 1999, p. 324).

While the sequence of physical development is relatively constant among adolescents, there can be a great deal of variation regarding the actual age of onset and pace of development. Factors such as the individual's genetic and biological heritage, specific life-events, socio-economic situation, health and diet, and amount of body fat all contribute to pubertal timing and course (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002, pp. 7-10). The general course of adolescence finds its conclusion around the ages 17-19 for girls and 20 for boys. Interestingly, although the developmental category of adolescence is marked by the onset of physical puberty, its conclusion lacks any definitive physical markers. A rather more social marker is the transition of the individual into the capacity to "take on adult responsibilities" (Rathus et al, 2005, p. 237).[10]

Males and females encounter similar physical changes in the course of puberty and adolescence, most obviously in secondary sex characteristics, such as skeletal growth spurts, the appearance of body hair, the achievement of fertility, and the concomitant shift in their bodies to support fertility (APA, 2002; Rathus et al, 2005). "For boys, the onset of puberty involves enlargement of the testes at around age 11 or 12 and first ejaculation, which typically occurs between the ages of 12 and 14" (APA, 2002, p. 7). Later in puberty, males will also experience lowering of the voice. For females, the shift involves breast budding (the initial growth of female breasts) beginning as early as ages eight or nine, and menarche (first menstruation) typically around ages 12-13 (APA, 2002, p. 7; Rathus et al, 2005).

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[10] There exists, therefore, the possibility that many of us do not actually leave the developmental stage of adolescence at any time in the lifespan, or do so only sporadically, despite our outward appearances of adulthood.

Although both adolescent males and females enter biologically into the transition from childhood to adulthood, there are obvious physical differences in their respective transitions. There is also strong evidence to suggest that the specifics regarding individual perceptions and social constructions of pubertal development and transition differ significantly between males and females (and also among them). In the following section I deal more closely with female adolescent pubertal development, with a focused consideration of menarche as a pivotal moment, both privately and socially, in adolescent female development.

Menarche

I have chosen menarche (first menstruation) in particular as the focal discussion point in adolescent female biological development both because it is a physical marker of puberty and adolescence and because it bears a good deal of weight in social constructions of girls' sexual development and ensuing sexual behaviour. Further, in constructing an embodied sexual theology that takes seriously the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the female bleeding body, so long disparaged in theological discussion, takes on profound significance. The bodies and blood of females historically have been constructed very differently from males', although they share equally in the image of God (Beattie, 2003). The reciprocal influence of the Christian theological tradition and Western social constructions has resulted in an understanding of menstruation that disparages its power as life-giving. Females' bodies and blood, far from the redemptive nature of Christ's body and blood, are framed as polluted and uncontrollable. My consideration of menarche in the course of female adolescent sexual development deliberately explores the implications of such an attitude towards menstruation in both the lived experiences of adolescent females and the evolving construction of sexual theology.

In this section I address some of the multidisciplinary literature concerning the nature of menarche in contemporary Western culture, with an eye to its popular and educational representation particularly aimed at adolescent females.[11] I also explore a number of themes that I perceive to be dominant in the literature pertaining to menarche and adolescent females' experiences thereof. I understand menarche to hold particular significance in the gendered sexual development of girls, primarily as a result of its lack of recognition in the broader social context.

As noted above, menarche is one of a number of physical changes that pubertal girls experience, including "accelerated growth in height and weight, an increase in the percentage of overall body fat, and the emergence of secondary sexual characteristics" such as breast buds and pubic hair growth (Dell, 2000, p. 136; see also Golub, 1992). Dell notes that the average ages of menarche are 12.9 years and 12.2 years for girls of European American ancestry and African American ancestry respectively. This indicates that puberty ages have been decreasing in the past century. Current speculation is that this decrease is due in part to increased health and nutrition, and will likely soon stabilize (Brooks-Gunn, 1992; Dell, 2000, pp. 134-138).

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[11] Although there are myriad experiences of pubertal females in other cultures, I limit my discussion here primarily to Western/North American society for the purposes of focus and brevity. I further recognize the wide diversity of cultural realities within Western/North American society, and indicate significant distinctions when possible.

As much as menarche is a biological event, however, so too is it a psychological and social event (e.g., Diorio & Munro, 2000; Golub, 1992; Merskin, 1999; Moore, 1995; Williams & Currie, 2000). As a transitional event from girlhood to womanhood, menarche has a unique place in the understanding of what it means to be female in any given society. For instance, Dell (2000) points to extensive mention of and ritual demand around menstruation in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., *Lam 1:8-9; Ez 16:1-9; Lv 12-15; Lv 17-26),* a sign that menstruation was negatively constructed within the purity guidelines and Holiness Code of the Hebrew community (pp. 129-134). Menstruating females were considered unclean and to be physically separated from males. To a certain extent, menstrual uncleanliness was associated with contagious illness; a man who was sexually intimate with a menstruating woman was to be "expelled from the people of Israel to maintain cultic purity" (Dell, 2000, p. 132). More to the point, however, is how this historical social construction of menstruation, surely known to menarcheal girls at the time, shaped both its contemporary females' and our current understanding of menarche, menstruation, and womanhood.

> These biblical messages, explicit and implicit, accurately or inaccurately derived from Scripture and the authority of religious institutions, and handed down through faith communities over the centuries have influenced western civilization's approach to the development of young females both directly through churches and indirectly through wider cultural means. (Dell, 2000, p. 134)

Given the embedded nature of Judeo-Christian social and moral norms in Western cultures, the historical context of menstruation, derived in part from strict Jewish codes of behaviour, is fraught with judgments regarding cleanliness and womanhood.

In our contemporary context, menarcheal girls are the targets of advertising aiming for menstrual product loyalty from the start of menstruation through to menopause (Brumberg, 1997; Erchull, Chrisler, Forman, & Johnston-Robledo, 2002; Moore, 1995; Simes & Berg, 2001). Adolescent females are also socialized in their learning about menstruation and reproduction in sexual education programs in schools (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Swensen, Foster, & Asay, 1995). Further, there is extensive evidence to suggest that the broader social construction of menarche and menstruation has an impact on adolescent girls' own perceptions and constructions of the meaning of menstrual and menarcheal experiences as individuals and as a group (Chrisler & Zittel, 1998; Golub, 1992; Koff & Rierdan, 1996 & 1995; Koff, Rierdan, & Jacobson, 1981; Moore, 1995; Trad, 1993; Williams & Currie, 2000).

While the literature seems to indicate general agreement about the reality that menarche is an important event in the lives of adolescent girls, still there is less agreement about *what* impact that event has on girls' lives. I have encountered in the literature four recurring themes that I will explore as a means of discerning how puberty and menarche affect adolescent girls. This exploration can by no means be considered an exhaustive treatment of the literature, but can provide appropriate depth of understanding of the experiences of menarche. These themes are: 1) Affective Ambiguity and Experiential Ambivalence; 2) Preparation, Secrecy, and Hiding; 3) Bodies and Sexuality; and 4) Messages and Discussion. The nature of these four themes points to the interconnection of biological/physical development of adolescent females and the social context in which these experiences take place. In particular, the themes point to the social construction of gender (not sex), and the ways in which gender develops alongside biology. As the female introductory moment into sexuality, menarche plays an important role in shaping female sexuality through adolescence and adulthood.

Affective Ambiguity and Experiential Ambivalence.

Ambiguity and ambivalence seem pervasive in girls' affective, somatic, and cognitive experiences of menarche and menstruation (Golub, 1992). These themes have been strikingly consistent in studies conducted over recent decades. At least as early as 1981, girls' ambivalence (in fact, imbalance towards negative perceptions) regarding menarche was clearly recognized in the literature (Koff, Rierdan, & Jacobson, 1981). In a 1983 overview of menarcheal studies, Brooks-Gunn and Ruble identified the phenomenon of "pubertal amnesia", wherein girls were reluctant to describe the significance of their experiences of menarche. “Girls, when asked about their pubertal experiences, were likely to say that puberty and menarche had little impact upon them, but also recounted vignettes suggesting a profound effect of such experiences” (p. 157). Further, college-aged women seemed to forget events specific to their experiences of puberty, while they remembered details of experiences prior to and following puberty.

Some time later, in her study of Grade Six Australian girls, Moore (1995) uncovered a distinct ambivalence in the majority of self-reported attitudes towards menstruation within both interviews and questionnaires. While 60% of respondents indicated that they recognized the advantage in growing up that was implicit in menarche and menstruation, the majority was unsure of “the idea of a first period being a great event in their lives” (p. 96). Indeed, the majority expressed feelings of “embarrassment, discomfort, and ambivalence” about growing up in general, and “shame, embarrassment, and anxiety” about menstruation in particular (p. 102). In her qualitative, interview-based, study of adolescent experiences of puberty, sexuality, and the self, Martin (1996) also encountered ambivalence about puberty and linked that ambivalence to two factors: 1) lack of subjective knowledge about their bodies and 2) the association of puberty to adult female sexuality (pp. 20-21). More recently, Chrisler and Zittel (1998) noted that, in stories recounted in college women’s reminiscences of their menarcheal experiences (women from four different cultures: Lithuanian, American, Malaysian, and Sudanese), the most common emotion mentioned by the Americans was embarrassment, distantly followed by pride, anxiety, and elation (p. 308). What is the impact of such mixed emotions and perceptions of this pivotal maturational event in the lives of adolescent girls? If girls (and women) are consistently ambivalent about this experience, what do they do with its immanence or presence in their own or others' lives? And what is the impact of this experience on their sexual development through adolescence and into adulthood?

Preparation, Secrecy, and Hiding.

Preparation for menarche seems to be facilitated most easily with cognitive (informational) and subjective (experiential) knowledge of menstruation (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1983; Koff & Rierdan, 1995; Martin, 1996). An interesting phenomenon in the formal education of North American girls regarding impending menarche is that much of the information is provided both directly (via educational materials to schools and agencies) and indirectly (via advertising) by companies producing menstrual hygiene products (Brumberg, 1997; Merskin, 1999; Simes & Berg, 2001). Brumberg (1997) suggests that the move towards the wholesale social adoption of commercially-produced menstrual products has actually shifted menarche from a "maturational event" to an "hygienic crisis" (see also Havens & Swenson, 1988). Our previous concern to educate girls into their developing reproductive capacities has become a preoccupation with concealing the reality of menstruation, and therefore menarche, with the use of the appropriate products. Moore's (1995) study found that, in projective testing regarding attitudes towards menstruation, "deception" was the most common theme portrayed. Interestingly, this excluded mothers: "The importance of secrecy surrounding menstruation was stressed, including keeping the fact of one's period a secret from fathers, friends, and especially boys in general. Mothers were usually excluded from the need for secrecy" (p. 97).

The need for secrecy regarding menstruation is likely well warranted in its contemporary Western social construction. In a small study testing reactions to perceived knowledge of the menstrual status of a female peer, Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, and Pyszczynski (2002) found that participants responded negatively to a female who accidentally dropped a tampon (as opposed to a hair clip) from her bag. While the study is limited by small size, homogeneity of participants, and control for initial perceptions of tampons and hair clips in general, still the results (i.e., lower evaluation of the female's competence, lower evaluation of her likeableness, greater physical distancing from her, and greater overall objectification of women) point to broad and negative perceptions of menstruating women and women in general, by both males and females.

Interestingly, the results regarding the general objectification of women did not hold true for less gender stereotyped participants (i.e., undifferentiated or androgynous gender). The authors make the following point in their final discussion: "These findings suggest that the great lengths to which many women go to avoid revelation of menstrual status and discussion of related issues may indeed be well-founded, for reminders of menstruation do appear to lead to negative judgments of women" (Roberts et al, 2002, p. 138). Hence, the need for secrecy regarding menarcheal and menstrual status among adolescents is consistent with a broader social attitude that constructs female menstrual bleeding as negative.

Advertisements for menstrual products facilitate this need for secrecy regarding menstruation by suggesting that the use of the wrong product will likely lead to the very "embarrassment" and "shame" linked to girls' ambivalence around menstruation (Simes & Berg, 2001). Simes and Berg (2001), in fact, found that menstrual product advertisements heightened the insecurities of girls, reflected negative social attitudes, and perpetuated and maintained silence and shame regarding menstruation. Slightly less negative findings were reported by Erchull, Chrisler, Gorman, and Johnson-Robledo (2002) in their examination of commercially-produced booklets about menstruation. While they noted that the booklets contained anatomical inconsistencies, no information about the subjective experience of menstruation, a narrow portrayal of the diverse users of the products, little contextual understanding of menarche within puberty, and maintained the culture of secrecy regarding menstruation, still they did not promote menstruation as a hygiene crisis.[12]

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[12] Stereotypes and mixed messages regarding menstruation can also be found on Internet websites directed at adolescent females, the newest form of menstrual education/advertising offered by producers of "feminine hygiene" products. The Proctor and Gamble Inc. administered website "beinggirl.ca" offers an advice column ("Scoops"). One particular edition ("When your period comes kicking and screaming") states that the key to having a "happy period" is to use "products that work for you". Conveniently, their products will work for you (i.e., *Tampax* tampons and *Always* pads). Within this particular column, the unknown author initially frames menstruation negatively: menstrual cramps, cravings, mood swings, poor body image, "feeling tired and light-headed", and ruining your "favourite pair of jeans". This negative frame is then countered by positive antidotes to the distress of menstruation: walking, bathing, eating popcorn, watching movies, shopping, a makeover, crying). The final paragraph tells us: "Instead of wishing you were a boy, relish in the fact that you are a woman!" Egad! After all that, it hardly seems likely that *Tampax* tampons, *Always* pads, some popcorn, and a little exercise is an appealing alternative to being male (whatever that means). See: http://www.beinggirl.ca/en_CA/pages/articledetail.php?ContentId=ART10415.

Merskin (1999) found more positive developments in her investigation of menstrual products aimed at adolescents. While admitting that menstruation still is not portrayed positively in girls' lives, her study posits that advertisements for feminine hygiene products are evolving by suggesting "ways for girls to feel more secure in light of the social system in which they live" (p. 955). Unfortunately, Merskin offers little substantial critique of the social system that would make girls feel insecure about a universally occurring female biological event. Here lies the need for secrecy and concealment.

In an otherwise largely ineffective study[13] of early adolescent females' responses to menarche, McGrory (1990) identified one interesting finding unrelated to the explicit data collected: the resistance of parents to allow their daughters to participate in the study. Approximately 41% of parents approached declined their daughters' participation because they themselves were uncomfortable and embarrassed by the subject matter (i.e., "a much too personal topic") (p. 268). I have located no more recent studies to suggest that such an attitude, one that reinforces the cultural norm of silence around menstruation and seems somewhat unhelpful to the healthy development of girls through puberty and beyond, no longer exists.

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[13] There were a number of problems with the study. First, although McGrory hoped to do a quantitative comparison of pre-menarcheal and post-menarcheal girls' attitudes towards menstruation, she did not achieve an adequate sample size of either group to extrapolate from her results. Further, the Menstrual Attitudes Questionnaire (MAQ), one of three questionnaires administered to the participants, did not provide for differentiation between pre- and post-menarcheal girls. Thus, many of the questions were left unanswered by the pre-menarcheal girls. Finally, because the MAQ was inappropriate for early adolescent girls in general, less than one third of the participants actually completed the questionnaire. Thus, the results are dubious.

On the other hand, Diorio and Munro (2000) question the efficacy of teaching menarche and menstruation as a matter of course in co-ed schools within a culture that remains biased to the male experience. They point out the disparity of social messages passed on to boys and girls regarding sexual development, and contend that to teach menstruation and menarche openly in an environment that characterizes female bleeding as disgusting and female bodies as desirous to boys leaves girls vulnerable to a power-over relationship with boys. While all are taught that puberty signals for boys strength and power in muscle growth, they are also taught that menstruation signals sexuality and uncleanliness for girls.[14] Thus, girls embody the ambiguity of puberty and choose concealment as a means of surviving menarche and subsequent menstruation. They conclude:

> The material which girls encounter proclaims the need for secrecy and helps construct their acceptance of the concealment of menstruation as positive. Girls are thus inducted into complicity in their own control through a cultural charade in which everyone knows that virtually all women between puberty and menopause menstruate, but everyone pretends that no specific woman is menstruating at any given time. (Diorio & Munro, 2000, p. 361)

They ultimately suggest that until we “address the personal uncertainties and social meaning with which girls must come to terms in the process of their own pubertal development”, adults will continue to fail to prepare girls adequately for the reality of menstruation (p. 362).

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[14] Martin (1996) also notes that menarche and menstruation are laden with associations to dirt, shame, taboo, and danger in their link to excrement and excretion. She suggests: “girls learn these cultural meanings from peers, parents, siblings, advertising, and boys’ joking” (p. 29).

Research consistently suggests that the task of preparation for menarche lies squarely with mothers; they are the primary purveyors of education about and preparation for menarche to adolescent girls (Brooks-Gunn, 1992; Koff & Rierdan, 1995; Koff, Rierdan, & Jacobson, 1981). In their study of adolescent girls' recommendations regarding how to prepare for menstruation, Koff and Rierdan (1995) noted that daughters perceive mothers' roles as important and delicate in their preparation for menarche: they should be tactful, poised, and knowledgeable. Mothers should provide information (including regarding hygiene), emotional support, understanding, encouragement, sensitivity, and comfort. Mothers should also be comfortable themselves with the discussion of menstruation and menarche, and be careful not to embarrass their daughters. Importantly, girls rely on their mothers to normalize the reality of menstruation and to stress that it is not something to be hidden.

The phenomenon of the involvement of mothers seems to reach outside of North America. In Chrisler and Zittel's (1998) cross-cultural study they found that, with the exception of the Malaysian women, all were prepared for menarche primarily by their mothers and that, across the board, their mothers were overwhelmingly the first persons they told about their menarche. Moore (1995) also found mothers exempt from the secrecy surrounding menarche and menstruation in her study of Australian girls. And Skandhan, Pandya, Skandhan, and Mehta (1988) found Indian girls most interested in receiving more preparatory information about menstruation from their mothers, a preference "rooted in the 'holy' relationship between mother and daughter" (p. 152). In contrast, girls generally found very little place for their fathers' involvement in preparation for menstruation, and indicated a general sense of embarrassment and discomfort in discussing menstruation with them (Koff & Rierdan, 1995).

In consideration of the above information, menarche and menstruation seem almost as precarious a business for mothers and other adults engaged in preparation of adolescent girls as it is for the girls themselves. Moreover, we seem as a society to be failing our girls in this respect: they are openly targeted with marginally helpful information by menstrual product companies with dubious intentions and they are silently co-opted into ongoing social secrecy with regard to the reality of menarche and menstruation. I suggest that as a community we are tacitly perpetuating an understanding of girls' pubertal and maturing sexual bodies that places them at risk in their capacity to make healthy choices for themselves: this perpetuation is their welcome to sexuality. As the studies cited above suggest, adolescent girls themselves are asking for better.

Bodies and Sexuality.

In 2007 the American Psychological Association [APA] published the report of its Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. Confronting the myriad ways in which girls are sexualized in contemporary Western culture (e.g., toy manufacturing and marketing, advertising, television programming, internet sites) the Task Force aimed to define sexualization, examine the prevalence\ and examples of sexualization of girls, examine evidence suggesting that sexualization has a negative impact on girls, and describe positive ways to counter pervasive sexualization of girls (2007, p.2). According to their definition, sexualization occurs when:

> a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person. (APA, 2007, p.2)

While the presence of any one of these characteristics would indicate sexualization (as opposed to healthy sexuality), the fourth characteristic is especially important to children. In this light, the findings are grim. The report points to factors such as compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexual attraction, the proliferation of plastic surgery both for adults and non-adults, the impact of various media in developing and reflecting social attitudes regarding sexualization, the entertainment industry's perpetuation of a particular body image and particular gender roles, the design and marketing of inappropriate (e.g., sexualized or violent) toys to children, and the promotion of adult-appropriate clothing and cosmetics for children, as ways in which girls are sexualized in contemporary Western society (APA, 2007). As Cook and Kaiser (2004) point out, however, the phenomenon of the sexualization of girls has an historical social and consumer context. Outlining the gradual emergence of the *Tween* (a person between childhood and adolescence), they propose that the cultural development of the Tween cannot be understood separately from market forces and the rise of consumerism in Western culture. Thus consumerism and marketing appear to be directly tied to the sexualization of girls and our interpretation of pre-, post-, and pubertal girls' bodies.

In this light, it is wise to frame menarche further within the social perceptions of female bodies and sexualities. "In a world where the female body is sexualized so early and the stakes are so high, it now seems obvious that it is not enough to teach girls how to be clean and dainty" (Brumberg, 1997, p. 55). Brumberg's critique of the shift in focus regarding menarche and menstruation from its developmental and maturational significance to its external hygienic significance points to the implications for girls' perceptions of their own sexualities and bodies. By sanitizing menarche and menstruation away from their sexual meanings and responsibilities, she suggests that socially, we reinforce cultural messages about what constitutes an acceptable body and "set the stage for obsessive over-attention to other aspects of the changing body, such as size and shape" (p. 55).

Brumberg's hypothesis seems to be further borne out in the literature (Brooks-Gunn, 1992; Golub, 1992; Martin, 1996; Moore, 1995; Prendergast, 1995; Williams & Currie, 2000). Brooks-Gunn (1992) notes that the cultural standards around ideal body size are far more influential for girls than for boys. Thus, the normal weight gain that accompanies puberty and sexual development is met with disdain: for females the ideal is a "linear lean, almost pre-pubertal body" (p.99). The increase in size that pushes girls out of the pre-pubertal body triggers body image crises that manifest as ambivalence regarding sexual development. Indeed, Williams and Currie (2000) found that any pubertal development that occurred outside of the "normal" timeframe triggered reports from adolescent girls of being "too fat" (early maturers) and "too thin" (late maturers) (p. 143; see also Golub, 1992 and Striegel-Moore & Cachelin, 1999). Cauffman and Steinberg (1996) also note, that when coupled with heterosexual social activities,[15] menarcheal timing profoundly affects girls' tendencies to diet and their propensities towards disordered eating. Changes (or lack thereof) in body size directly connected to puberty and hence menarche thus incited negative evaluations of body size and poor body-image in the girls.

Prendergast (1995) explores this possibility with some profundity from the perspective of critical gender analysis. She posits that at puberty girls' experiences are evaluated more negatively and framed more problematically than boys' experiences. This problematization in turn leads to a more negative evaluation of the maturing (and mature) female body in general, and the menstruating body in particular.

> One might speculate that at adolescence girls are poised between the experience of bodily shock, fragmentation and disorder that seems to accompany menstrual experience in the West, and a pervasive sense that in fact this is their body at its best, its most ideal. From this time on, from the immanence of this fragile and contradictory arrival, a young woman has much to lose: to grow up, to mature, to become adult and enter childbearing can only move her away from this childlike body. There are clear connections here with what has been described as the current epidemic of eating disorders in young women: the attempt to freeze adolescence, to hold on to a childlike body, and to control it rigidly through diet. Perhaps significantly, one consequence of anorexia and bulimia is that menstruation itself ceases. (Prendergast, 1995, p. 208)

This attention to the body, both by adolescent girls themselves and by those around them (i.e., peers, family, boys, adults), leads to a self-objectification of the body as a means of controlling not only appearance, but also appearance of sexuality (Martin, 1996). Throughout puberty girls are under scrutiny about their bodies and concomitantly scrutinize themselves. Hence they develop an understanding of the body-self as an object to be manipulated, controlled, and shaped into an acceptable form. Martin (1996) further proposes that "[t]here are two results of girls' objectification of their bodies. One, girls treat their bodies like distinct others, or two, they psychologically piece apart their bodies and work on them until their body becomes their accomplishment. Both indicate an alienation of the self from body, although the first is most extreme" (pp. 40-41).

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[15] There was no exploration or mention in the study of whether homosexual social activities incited similar issues for menarcheal girls.

Clearly, because the body is the locus for sexual experience, any distancing of self from body could be problematic in decision-making and evaluation regarding sexuality and sexual activity. This distancing could serve partially to explain why pubertal timing is so important in understanding sexual activity among adolescent girls (Golub, 1992; Miller, Norton, Fan, & Christopherson, 1998). The earlier puberty occurs, the earlier it would seem girls internalize perceptions of their bodies, and hence disembody themselves. Tolman (2002a) proposes that such disembodiment is in fact dissociation from the adolescent female sexual self. In so disembodying themselves, girls compromise their capacity to discern desire and pleasure, and conversely displeasure and pain, in their sexual experiences, and hence at times make choices that in turn compromise their own well-being.

One theoretical formulation that is useful in exploring the destructive tendencies of adolescent females regarding their own and others' bodies is objectification theory. In their explication of objectification theory, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) propose that the socio-cultural context of sexual objectification that females encounter routinely illuminates the experiences and mental health of girls and women. They state: "Sexual objectification occurs whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her". That is, "women are treated *as bodies*- and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175). Perhaps more pointedly, the theory further states that objectification by others leads females to adopt a view of self that leads them to treat themselves as objects to be scrutinized by society. When a girl or woman internalizes social objectification, it becomes self-objectification, a means to determine how she will be perceived socially (p. 177-180).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) posit that the impact of the self-objectification of females is immense. They propose objectification theory as a means by which we can understand girls' and women's psychological experiences of the emotion of shame, the emotion of anxiety, peak motivational states, and awareness of internal body states. They conclude that self-objectification negatively influences women's experiences of each of the above by triggering perpetual and rigorous body monitoring. Body self-monitoring in turn triggers higher incidence of depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders (pp. 181-192). With particular regard to pubescent girls, they propose that the confluence of factors affecting adolescent girls' development requires integrative thinking with regard to the etiology of mental health disorders. If an adolescent girl recognizes upon puberty that her body is the subject of constant scrutiny, then she learns that her body belongs less to her and more to others. Citing empirical studies they state that at puberty, girls' bodies seem to become "public domain" (p. 193). They further predict:

> early experiences of sexual objectification, whether actual or anticipated, in turn trigger (a) the self-conscious body monitoring that results from internalizing an observer's perspective on self; (b) a range of deleterious subjective experiences, including excesses of shame and anxiety, fewer peak motivational states and numbness to internal bodily states; which may culminate to explain (c) increased risks for several poor mental health outcomes. (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 194)

Slater and Tiggeman (2002) further propose that the greater focus on self that is characteristic of adolescent development makes adolescent girls particularly vulnerable to the fallout of self-objectification. Their comparison study of adolescent girls between ballet dancers and non-dancers found no significant difference between the two groups regarding bodily shame and eating disorders. But they did find that body objectification, self-monitoring, body shame, and appearance anxiety were all pathways to disordered eating among girls as young as twelve and thirteen (2002); their hypothesis that body objectification theory was applicable to adolescent girls was affirmed. This hypothesis is further corroborated in Grabe, Hyde, and Lindberg's (2007) study of the roles of gender, shame, and rumination in body objectification and depression among adolescents. Although they found that adolescent boys experience some body objectification, it did not correlate with depression as it did with girls. Thus gender, bodily shame and, in particular, rumination were all found to be determiners of depression among adolescent girls as young as 11 years of age.

Finally, in an application of objectification theory specifically to women's perceptions of menstruation, Roberts and Waters (2004)[16] suggest that females' internalizing sexual objectification "produces ambivalent attitudes and attributions toward normal female body and reproductive functions (viz., menarche and menstruation)" (p. 18). They further suggest that, when the internalization is to the degree of self-objectification, "the experience of the menstruating body is viewed even more negatively, and is characterized by self-loathing, disgust, and flight or dissociation from their corporeal selves" (p. 18). Their final postulation is that some correlation exists between these phenomena and "the rise of depression and disordered eating during adolescence" (p. 18). Objectification theory thus provides a formulation capable not only of identifying the outcomes of sexual objectification and self-objectification, but also of identifying the mechanisms by which these processes work.

As a society, it would appear that we have walked pubertal, adolescent girls to the precipice of negative self-perception and concomitant responses to the world. While the menarcheal girl embodies female creativity at its most primal, she simultaneously embodies the social perceptions of gender, menstruation, and developing maturity. It is little wonder then that ambivalence regarding menarche is a common experience among girls. To balance the onset of physical maturity with a culture of secrecy regarding menstruation and a culture of control regarding their developing bodies is precarious, at best. Again, it is no surprise that there exists a "growing body of data suggesting that menarche is perceived and experienced by young adolescent girls in a primarily negative light" (Koff, Rierdan, & Jacobson, 1981, p. 157; see also Brumberg, 1997). How does such a negative introduction to their own sexuality prepare females for the integration of sexuality into their whole persons?

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[16] See also Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, and Pyszczynski (2002).

Messages and Discussion.

In 1970 Judy Blume published *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.*, an adolescent novel about a young girl's movement into puberty. Blume explored the anxieties, hopes, expectations, and experiences of Margaret and her friends as they anticipated their first menstruation, the growth of their breasts, and their transition into womanhood. This novel remains in the canon of adolescent girls' literature today as a frank, funny, and poignant fictional account of menarche in North America. Some 35 years later, adolescent girls continue to face the reality of menarche in much the same way as Margaret did - with curiosity, ambivalence, secrecy, and even at times humour.

In the National Film Board of Canada's *Under Wraps: A Film About Going with the Flow* (Wheelwrite & MacInnes, 1996), Judy Blume recounts her experience writing *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.* She notes that there were mixed reactions to the book upon its initial release, and that some libraries refused to carry it because of its subject matter. In recalling her subsequent experiences with readers of the book, Blume wept: so many of them said that they had never had the chance to speak openly about menstruation in general or their own menarche in particular. If this is the case more generally, what messages are adolescent girls receiving about menarche, menstruation, development, and sexuality? More to the point, perhaps, what messages are we as a society sending to menarcheal adolescent girls in a culture focused on bodily perfection, hygiene, and manipulation? Our own ambivalence toward menstruation and need for its concealment effect a menarcheal silence that is deafening.

> We live in a greeting-card culture where, for twenty-five cents, we can purchase socially approved statements about childbirth, marriage, or death. But Hallmark manufactures no cards that say, "Best Wishes on Becoming a Woman." Rather than celebrate the coming-of-age in America, we hide the fact of the menarche, just as we are advised to deodorize, sanitize, and remove the evidence. (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988, p. 107)

Whatever rites of passage through the liminal period of pubescence and the developmental event of menarche may currently exist or have historically existed in other cultures (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988; Turner, 1987), we see little formal evidence of them in current North American culture.[17] Perhaps as a means of exploring the social and emotional meaning of menarche in a profound way, some rite of passage is in order – grand or humble (Golub, 1992, p. 49). In fact, in their recommendations for the preparation of adolescent girls for menarche, post-menarcheal adolescents identified some form of discrete recognition by the parents

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[17] A possible exception to the dearth of meaningful ritual in adolescent girls' lives is the Latin American ritual celebration of *Quinceanera*, a girl's fifteenth birthday celebration. Although it is not tied explicitly to menarche or menstruation, the celebration certainly has overtones of the transition into womanhood. This is not, however, a ritual universally celebrated in Latin American cultures and contexts, nor is it universally understood in its meaning and purpose. For useful and diverse explorations of the *Quinceanera* see Cantu, 1999; Davalos, 1996; Gomez, 1997; and Horowitz, 1993.

(or at least the mother) as desirous to mark the event (e.g., a flower, a special meal out) (Koff & Rierdan, 1995).

Instead of significant, positive recognition of menarche and female sexuality, we currently see paradoxical reflections of maturity and shame.

> Conflicting messages congratulating the girls for becoming a woman at the same time that she is cautioned to become virtually obsessed with keeping “it” a secret from others may simply make the task of balancing the positive and negative aspects of menarche, such that menstruation becomes associated primarily with negative affect. (Koff, Rierdan, & Jacobson, 1981, p. 157)

It appears that, when our social messages regarding menarche and menstruation are mixed, girls’ perceptions of that ambiguity fall towards negative affect; they have difficulty successfully negotiating developing maturity and negative social messages about bleeding, sexual bodies. Hence the experience acquires a rather negative association.

While biological/physical development in adolescence is in itself meaningful in human movement through the lifespan, it is clear that Western socialization around sex and gender that accompanies this physical development is equally weighty. In particular, adolescent girls are subject to powerful critiques and prescriptions of the natural bodily phenomena of puberty and adolescence. For many of these girls, the social messages are internalized resulting in their self-objectification. Such a response is problematic, given its mental health consequences. If we were to couple female adolescent pubertal development with Elkind’s (2001 & 1981) theory of the egocentric adolescent, there would be further theoretical substantiation for the perceived difficulties girls face regarding body-image and self-esteem. In the light of Erikson's developmental stage of adolescence as an identity forming stage (Muuss, 1996), Elkind posits that adolescent egocentrism (as opposed to other developmental egocentrisms) leads them to construct an *imaginary audience:* a sense that they are the centre of attention in all social situations. Thus, the responses of others to the adolescent (as those responses are self-interpreted) tend to confirm their positive or negative self-evaluation. Further, he posits the *personal fable* as a means for adolescents to verify their belief in their own uniqueness (2001). If indeed adolescent girls perceive themselves to be under constant scrutiny as the stars of their own shows and if indeed they create a fable to undergird their belief in their own uniqueness, it would be understandable that they both seek acceptance within a broader social group (and therefore go to great lengths to dress similarly to their peers) and seek to be recognized as unique (and therefore colour their hair blue). In a sense, the dilemma reinforces the double bind for adolescent girls - the need to be accepted as the same, and the need to be understood as different.

The biological, sexual development of adolescent females is clearly a complex phenomenon. Despite its universal manifestation in females, its individual location within particular social structures colours girls' perceptions of their bodily, sexual selves in their worlds. Adolescent females' experiences of their own sexualities, beginning with the very visible physical manifestation of a bleeding body, are shaped extensively by social interpretations of menarche and menstruation. Western society introduces girls to their sexuality by encouraging its secrecy, inviting them to respond ambivalently to their own embodied selves. In Christian theological terms, the Christian community invites adolescent females into an ambivalent relationship with their incarnate selves – their creation in the image of God. From the initial moment of their transition into womanhood, their movement into adult female sexuality, we invite them to hide their own experience of the Incarnation. Social ambivalence with the bleeding bodies of females detracts from any positive interpretation of adolescent girls' biological development.

Biological development, however, is only one facet that contributes to the myriad challenges of adolescence. If adolescents are indeed developing their selves and characters in this pivotal hormonal, physiological moment, such development occurs in concert with neural development. While hormonal surges and identity formation, generally located within the body, contribute to adolescent development (including menarche and its social interpretation), so too do developments occurring within the brain. To this facet of biological adolescent development I now turn.

Neural Development in Adolescence

Common to adolescent females and males is the newly explored area of neural development.[18] While neural development clearly is an aspect of biological and physical development, its particular impact on adolescent development is a rather recent area of study. Historically, a good deal of research focus regarding development through puberty and adolescence assumed that hormones were the primary factors in the overall developmental process (Altman, 2004). Recently, however, the concomitant influence of neural functions on all developmental factors has become more readily acknowledged (e.g., Romeo, Richardson, & Sisk, 2002). Recognition that the adolescent brain is differently developed from the child or adult brain is also rather recent. In the 1960s–1970s, researchers began to observe and compare post-mortem brains of human children, adolescents, and adults. Only then did they identify the differences among the developing brains and begin investigating the cognitive, affective, and behavioural implications of these differences (Blakemore & Frith, 2005).

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[18] The differences and similarities between adolescent female and male neural development are not well explored. Although in their large-scale longitudinal neuro-imaging study Lenroot et al. (2007) found size differences between males' and females' brains (males' brain size is "consistently reported to be ~8-10% larger" than females' [p. 1]), they noted that the developmental differences were not linear across the brain. Further, their study did not explore the functional differences between male and female adolescent brains. Thus, as they point out, there remains "a particular paucity of data on sexual dimorphism of human brain anatomy between 4 and 22 years of age, a time of emerging sex differences in behavior and cognition" (p. 1).

This area of research has come to complement the prior strategy of focusing on hormonal changes that, over the years, seems to have made only modest inroads in understanding adolescent development (Spear, 2000). What has emerged is an appreciation for the complex interaction between neural and hormonal realities in adolescent development (Altman, 2004; Dahl, 2004; Romeo, 2003). Researchers in the field of neuro-endocrinology are beginning to make some progress disentangling the intricate process of hormonal and neural triggering around pubertal maturation and adolescent neural development (Romeo, 2003; Sisk & Foster, 2004). Given the nascent nature of these studies, however, much remains unexplored (e.g., the role of environment or sex in adolescent neural and hormonal development) (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006).

Early stages of study on the adolescent brain reveal two primary changes from the pre-pubescent to the adolescent brain (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). First is an apparent loss of grey-matter throughout early adolescence (Geidd et al., 1999; Luna et al., 2001; Spear, 2000). Current understanding of neural development points to the possibility that grey matter, wherein lay the neural structures from early childhood and pubertal synaptogenesis (or synaptic proliferation: expansion of the brain's capacities), is subject to substantial synaptic pruning. This synaptic pruning, the second primary change in the adolescent brain, allows for synapses that are not well used to make way for more efficient use of functioning synapses and follows a marked surge in early pubertal synaptic growth.

Concomitant with synaptic pruning is increased myelination, whereby the synapses become more efficient in neural processing: myelin insulates the neural axon and increases the speed and efficiency of transmission of electrical impulses from neuron to neuron (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006, p. 296). Different areas of the brain undergo synaptic pruning at different times in neural development. Thus, although grey matter is decreasing in the adolescent brain, the volume of brain tissue seems to remain stable by the process of myelination, the replacement of grey matter with white matter (i.e., myelin) (Andersen, 2003; Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006).

Neural functions associated with different areas of the brain yield cognitive, affective, and behavioural change at different times over the course of adolescence (Blakemore

& Frith, 2005; Dahl, 2004; Luna et al, 2001; Paus, 2005; Spear, 2000). It appears that, in the process of development, different parts of the brain undertake similar tasks depending upon the stage of neural development; as neural development proceeds through adolescence, the brain becomes more proficient and adept at addressing challenges of affect, cognition, and behavior (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007).[19] This conclusion appears to be supported by the generally simultaneous growth in functional capacity of adolescents with the development of the pre-frontal cortex.

Study of the still-developing adolescent brain has been greatly facilitated by the introduction of *Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI),* a non-intrusive means of examining and producing high-quality images of the human living brain.[20] In concert with structural MRI is functional MRI (fMRI), which facilitates observance of the brain and allows researchers to identify neural activity while persons perform particular cognitive, sensory, and motor functions (Paus, 2005; Yurgelun-Todd, 2007). Giedd et al.'s (1999) groundbreaking longitudinal MRI study notes that while the post-pubescent decrease in grey matter follows a surge in pubertal synaptic growth, the changes are "non-linear and regionally specific" (p. 861). This study also found that white matter changes (i.e., growth) are, in contrast to the grey matter, more linear in accord with age. In effect, Giedd et al. were able to discern that neural development is a process that moves variably through the brain. This non-linear development might account in part for the functional development of adolescents into adult-required capacities (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Luna et al, 2001).

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[19] In short, using the brain in progressively more challenging tasks is a developmental task that in turn is witnessed in neural development. Under normal circumstances, the brain becomes more functionally streamlined with time and experience.

[20] "**Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)** uses a very large magnetic field to produce high-quality three-dimensional images of brain structures without injecting radioactive tracers. A large cylindrical magnet creates a magnetic field around the person's head, and a magnetic pulse is sent through the magnetic field.

Different structures in the brain (so-called white matter and grey matter, blood vessels, fluid and bone, for example) have different magnetic properties and therefore they appear different in the MRI image. Sensors inside the scanner record the signals from the different brain structures and a computer uses the information to construct an image. Using MRI, it is possible to image both surface and deep brain structure in great anatomical detail" (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006, p. 298).

A general conclusion is that adolescents seem to be in a transitional stage of neural development (Spear, 2000). Contrary to previous suggestions that the brain and its functions experience "critical" phases of development (primarily in childhood), after which various neural capacities cease to be accessible, the human brain appears to develop into and well past adolescence (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Thus, the phases of development are now referred to as "sensitive" phases, "natural window[s] of plasticity" (Dahl, 2004, p. 6), in recognition of the profound capacity of the brain to compensate for developmental deficiencies and to continue to develop well past childhood (Andersen, 2003; Dahl, 2004; Romeo & McEwan, 2006).

While adolescents have attained the capacity for some cognitive higher functioning (certainly more than children), they remain less cognitively integrated than adults (Spear, 2000). The implications of this maturational process suggest that, at least to some extent, behavioural (e.g., risk-taking, impulse control, social interaction), cognitive (e.g., integration, abstract reasoning), and affective (e.g., lability, adaptive responses to stress, intensity) changes are correlated with neural development (Dahl, 2004; Spear, 2000). Many of these implications are tied to the relatively late development of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which "mediates the highest cognitive capacities, including reasoning, planning and behavioral control" (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007, p. 253). Blakemore and Choudhury (2006) point out, for example, that the frontal lobes mediate the "executive function" of the brain, "the capacity that allows us to control and coordinate our thoughts and behavior" (p. 301). Some of the skills attached to executive function include selective attention (i.e., focus), decision-making, voluntary response inhibition (i.e., suppressing instinctual active responses when indicated to do so), working memory, prospective memory (i.e., holding intentions for future actions and multi-tasking), and problem solving. Executive function skills typically improve over the course of adolescence (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Yurgelun-Todd, 2007). As Dahl (2004) points out, the complexity of intra-personal functions becomes quite clear in adolescent neural functioning:

> Being a responsible adult requires developing self-control over behavior and emotions to appropriately inhibit and modify behaviors – despite strong feelings – to avoid terrible consequences. It requires that individuals be capable of initiating and carrying out a specific sequence of steps toward a long-term goal even though it may be difficult (or boring) to persist in these efforts. Adolescents need to learn to navigate complex social situations despite strong competing feelings. Skills in self-regulation of emotion and complex behavior aligned to long-term goals must be developed. These self-regulatory processes are complex and mastering behavioral skills involves neurobehavioral systems served by several parts of the brain. The ability to integrate these multiple components of behavior – cognitive *and* affective – in the service of long-term goals involves neurobehavioral systems that are among the last regions of the brain to fully mature. (p. 18)

With regard to social cognition (e.g., self-awareness and the ability to attribute distinct mental processes to others), decision-making, and the prefrontal cortex, there also appears to be development during adolescence. Blakemore and Choudhury (2006) suggest that, in keeping with the pubertal synaptic growth and subsequent adolescent synaptic pruning, development of the capacity for social perspective-taking undergoes a brief "perturbation". This perturbation has an impact upon adolescents' capacity to undertake reasoning and decision-making:

> Early adolescence in humans is associated with a major transformation of cognitive thought leading to abstract reasoning... This cognitive acquisition is not absolute. The developmental emergence of formal reasoning emerges earlier when addressing problems associated with the physical world than with interpersonal issues, and even in adulthood some individuals do not consistently function at the formal reasoning stage. (Spear, 2000, p. 423)

Spear (2000) further points out that, when reasoning and decision-making, adolescents encounter difficulties not faced by other-aged/-developed persons. She suggests that, when adolescents are faced with decisions in stressful or perceived stressful situations (e.g., everyday stress or time-limited situations), they function more poorly than in "optimal test conditions" (p. 423).

This cognitive deficit points to the role of emotions and stress in adolescence. Blakemore and Choudhury (2006) note that emotion recognition develops over adolescence, following decline at puberty, particularly with regard to strong emotions (e.g., fear and disgust) (p. 303). Because social relationships and growth of independence take on new importance in adolescence, the ability to read and respond appropriately to personal and social cues is a key aspect of development. To function well socially among peers and others, adolescents must develop skills in marshalling incoming information and making decisions about how best to act under the circumstances. This ability appears to be associated with the prefrontal cortex, which facilitates integration and executive functioning in the brain. Yurgelun-Todd (2007) points out: "As children mature, they show an increased ability to attend to incoming information and control their behavior in a goal-directed manner… This development seems to emerge in conjunction with a progressive frontalization of functional activity associated with inhibitory processing" (p. 255).

Because adolescence is a transitional time on many fronts, stressors and perceived-stressors factor heavily into all facets of adolescents' lives. Most adolescents successfully negotiate the transition, with only an estimated 20% incidence of psychopathology (a rate similar to that exhibited in adults) (Spear, 2000, p. 428). However, elevated reports of depressed mood, emotional lability, disturbed sleep, anxiety, and self-consciousness are common among adolescents (Spear, 2000). While these manifestations and reports of negative affect among adolescents are disproportionately higher than among other persons, still, over time, the developing performance of the prefrontal cortex mitigates affective volatility as adolescence progresses.

> Additional imaging evidence in the affective domain suggests that the development of prefrontal modulation over emotional processing continues to develop throughout the adolescent years and into early adulthood. The maturation of prefrontal networks plays a critical role in the cognitive and emotional behaviors displayed by adolescents. (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007, p. 255)

There also appears to be some support for the role of neural development in adolescent risk-taking. Adolescents tend to be disproportionately higher risk-takers than both children and adults (Alberts, Elkind, & Ginsberg, 2006; Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Dahl, 2004; Spear, 2000). Interestingly, the synaptic pruning that takes place during adolescence requires substantial amounts of energy. Spear (2000) points out that this particular synaptic pruning appears to result in "a major decline in the amount of excitatory stimulation reaching the cortex" (p. 439). Thus, it is possible that risk-taking and stimuli-seeking behaviours of adolescents have a neural explanation. One such explanation is that given the low motivational stimulation of the adolescent brain, "adolescents are driven to seek more extreme incentives to compensate" (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006, p. 305). Spear speculates that as a result of the generally low positive impact that adolescents attain from motivational stimuli they "may pursue new appetitive reinforcers through increases in risk-taking/novelty-seeking and via engaging in deviant behaviors such as drug-taking" (Spear, 2000, p. 446).

Another explanation for risk-taking is that the adolescent brain does not function as efficiently as the adult brain and follows a different route to decision-making. Blakemore and Choudhury (2006) note that, "when confronted with a risky scenario, adults' relatively efficient responses were driven by mental images of possible outcomes and the visceral response to those images… however, adolescents relied more on reasoning capacities… hence the relatively effortful responses compared to adults" (p. 305). The comparatively undeveloped pre-frontal cortex of the adolescent brain works less efficiently than the adult brain in estimating risk (Blakemore & Frith, 2005). It is therefore likely that life experience in decision-making contributes to the neural realities of adult and adolescent decision-making and perceptions of risk-taking.

Current research suggests that our social expectations of adolescent behaviour might require mitigation by knowledge of these important factors in adolescent development. If pubertal development and neural restructuring are simultaneously affecting the cognition, affect, and behaviour of adolescents, even to varying degrees (which current studies indicate they are [Dahl, 2004]), then perhaps adult social expectations for their behaviour ought to account for these realities.[21] As Dahl (2004) further points out, however, it is not helpful to adopt a reductionist stance explaining adolescence. Rather, Dahl and other researchers advocate a more integrated consideration of neural development along with other factors such as hormonal shifts, socio-economic circumstances, or educational experience in understanding adolescence (e.g., Altman, 2004; Andersen, 2003; Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Romeo, 2003; Spear, 2000).

This focus on integration fits well with Lerner's theory of Developmental Contextualism (Muuss, 1996). Unlike influential theorists preceding him (e.g., Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg), Lerner suggests that consideration of contextual factors of development (e.g., gender development, sexual objectification) ought to weigh more heavily in our discussions of adolescence than strict application of generalized patterns and rules of development. For Lerner, this contextualization opens the door to a diversity of experiences and social circumstances in the formulation of policies and programs aiming to facilitate adolescents' well-being (Muuss, 1996). Within such a theory, there is room to address adolescents both as individuals and as a group; a contextual understanding of development accommodates its complexities through adolescence.

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[21] Again, some "hallmark" behaviours attributed to adolescents include mood swings, increased eating, increased/disrupted sleep patterns, risk-taking, diminished impulse control, defiance of authority, and lack of focus.

Summary

Adolescent development is clearly constituted by a confluence of individual, social, and physical factors interacting uniquely within each individual person. Within the nascent study of the adolescent brain there exist some key clues for our understanding of adolescence in general and adolescent sexuality in particular. Working harmoniously with hormonal triggers, neural triggers initiate and sustain the movement of the child towards adolescence. This complex and, at times, tumultuous process gets played out in the social and cultural lives of individual adolescents. Together, the plethora of factors of development provide the context in which this individual adolescent girl or boy moves into her or his own sexuality. As noted above, the various contributors to the life experiences of individuals foster their development as increasingly more responsible and integrated persons.

In this chapter I identify some aspects of adolescent development that are particularly salient for adolescent female sexuality: gender development, heteronormativity, moral development and voice, self-identity, hormonal transitions, like puberty and the pivotal moment of menarche, neural developments, and social interaction with and interpretation of biological phenomena. I focus extensive attention on menarche and menstruation to highlight the social (and theological) significance of female bleeding in the construction of sexuality and gender.

In the following chapter, I explore just what adolescents (females in particular) are doing with their sexuality, and the ways in which a theology rooted in feminist natural law might integrate those sexual realities more adequately into Roman Catholic sexual theology. If theologians are truly to recognize development as complex and ongoing throughout adolescence, then we ought to account for such developmental realities in our sexual theology. A theology that accounts for adolescent development needs to consider questions not previously entertained. What might gender development theory contribute to our understanding of normative sexual behaviour? What prerequisites for sexual flourishing might arise from an explicit consideration of the objectification of incarnate female sexuality? How might explicit acknowledgement of the goodness of female sexuality shape our formulation of a sexual theology appropriate for adolescent females? I explore questions such as these in the substance of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - THIS ONE'S FOR THE GIRLS: A SYNTHESIS OF DISCRETE DISCOURSES

The purpose of this fourth chapter is to synthesize the preceding two chapters and thereby to engage in a meaningful conversation between the discrete discourses of sexual theology and developmental psychology. A further purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which this engagement might facilitate the development of a sexual theology that accounts for, and is meaningful and relevant to, adolescent females. As I have outlined in the previous chapters, the experiences and interpretations of adolescent female sexuality provide ample evidence that either a strictly universal or strictly particular approach to sexual theology is untenable for adolescents. Such a sexual theology requires a framework solid and flexible enough to allow for both aspects of the human experience, and hence the profound ambiguity of sexuality itself, to form its content. My proposition is that a feminist natural law will provide such a framework. In this chapter I integrate empirical evidence regarding adolescent female sexuality within a feminist natural law framework to construct a robust sexual theology appropriate to adolescent females.

Full of Grace: Human Flourishing

The core theme providing grounds for synthesis between the bodies of theological and adolescent developmental discourses is human flourishing. Flourishing implies more than merely existing, surviving, or getting by; it means thriving, blossoming, and growing abundantly. Like all living things, human persons require a nurturing atmosphere and a hearty disposition to flourish. Abundant human experience shows that thriving is best facilitated by having basic needs met, by living freely and autonomously within loving personal and communal relationships, by having dignity respected and protected, by living in peace, by engaging in a useful and edifying education, by finding and affording meaning to life, and by having self-esteem nurtured. There exists no one definitive path to reach flourishing and we must be mindful as a human community of the variety of circumstances that might facilitate lived human flourishing. Such diversity of human experience thus points to the rich possibilities that flourishing holds for both sameness and diversity in its articulation.

Human flourishing finds a rich history within the millennia of Western philosophical thought. The contemporary notion of human flourishing seems rooted in the Aristotelian understanding of *eudaimonia,* the good (or happy) life or human good.[1] As philosophical thought has developed over the course of Western history, the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* and more contemporary notions of *the good life* have at times parted ways. While Artistotle's understanding of *eudaimonia* was posited to exist as an ideal (i.e., outside of human experience), his successors seem more rooted in human experience in their articulations of "the good life", or flourishing. Contemporary thinkers take a number of different approaches to the notion of human flourishing and its ethical accomplishment. For instance, Rasmussen (1999) posits an understanding of flourishing that is intrinsically linked to human nature but not to be confused with strictly self-serving goals and actions. Human flourishing is sought out by individual persons precisely because it is objectively "desirable and choiceworthy" in its inclusion of various human goods and virtues (Rasmussen, 1999, p. 3). Yet, it is not abstract from the lived experience of the person in action, the agent of those goods and virtues. Flourishing is thus self-directed within the broader social context of the person acting (pp. 3-14). The agent must, however, possess practical wisdom (or prudence) to grow into flourishing. *"Indeed, practical reason properly used, which is the virtue of practical wisdom, is the intelligent management of one's life so that all the necessary goods and virtues are coherently achieved, maintained, and enjoyed in a manner that is appropriate for the individual human being"* (italics original, p. 17). This developmental reality requires communal living, maturity, personal integrity, intelligence, and self-awareness fully to realize. Human persons will find flourishing in varying manifestations and degrees, based upon the confluence of their own capacities and circumstances.

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[1] Although an exploration of the history and development of the Aristotelian understanding of *eudaimonia* in Western philosophical thought would be interesting, it is outside of the scope of this project. I turn instead to some contemporary formulations of human flourishing while acknowledging their reliance on previous philosophical developments. It is note-worthy that contrary to thinkers preceding and contemporaneous to Thomas Aquinas (who were predominantly Platonic in their thinking), Aquinas himself relied heavily on Artistotle's thought, including the *Nicomachean Ethics,* in his own scholarship.

A theoretical formulation of human flourishing independent of the practical circumstances in which the human agent exists (or vice versa) renders it untenable in human experience. One must know intellectually what are virtues and good acts in any given situation, but one must also attend to the given situation to know what virtues and good acts are appropriate therein. In Rasmussen's formulation, human flourishing is both universal and particular, both theoretical and practical (1999). This formulation of human flourishing, as tied to human nature, assumes a human *telos* towards flourishing that is neither strictly universal nor strictly relative. On the contrary, human flourishing is both a universal and individual endeavor that evolves with the developing person in his or her own specific environment.

Hunt (1999) further points out that although flourishing might be self-interested (or egoistic), it is not necessarily selfish and disconnected from other human realities. Hunt proposes that in its ancient formulation, flourishing as self-interested developed alongside equally well-developed formulations of human virtues (see also Annas, 1993). That is, one could not have flourished without recognizing one's position within a broader human community that placed relational demands upon individual persons. Flourishing was not constituted solely by meeting personal desires and wants but, rather, included focus on others' goods and needs (Hunt, 1999). In Hunt's estimation, virtue and self-interest go hand-in-hand in the development of our understanding of flourishing. The relevance of Hunt's thesis for my purposes here is that persons cannot flourish within a simplistic construction of individualistic satisfaction; a relativistic notion of flourishing that cedes to personal autonomy independent of communal responsibility is untenable. My proposal here is not to have individual human flourishing run socially amok under the guise of unfettered autonomy. Rather, all human persons will flourish only in the recognition of their responsibilities to and for one another in their ethical choices.

Theological discourse about human flourishing has developed parallel to, and at times in concert with, Western philosophical traditions. Centuries of theological discourse state that ultimate human flourishing, that towards which all persons strive, exists in right relationship with God: we are tranquil in the heart of the Divine. Theological scholars, among them Thomas Aquinas and Cristina Traina, suggest that we seek, follow, and respond to the Divine in our profoundly human, and thus imperfect, endeavor to find union with God and the fullness of human flourishing. Theologically speaking, human flourishing is not merely a matter of ensuring that concrete needs and developmental milestones are met; rather, human flourishing also involves engagement with an immanent and transcendent God. Recognizing the teleological nature of flourishing in ancient philosophical thought about the human, Christian theological *telos* takes the human towards the Divine.

When we grapple with the dynamic tension between our concrete, particular circumstances and our intangible, shared striving towards the Divine, our human flourishing becomes manifest. For in this liminal space we find the immanent, incarnate God in human bodies: we either know God in our bodies, or we do not know God at all. The human sensory experiences of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch are located only in the body and thus the body is how we come to know the world. If we know God first and foremost in our relationships with others and with creation, then we do so as embodied persons. The body is, then, the locus of both our concrete experiences and our striving towards the divine: our flourishing.

That God chose human embodiment in the world is revelation enough that we are called to nourish the whole person into flourishing. As apparent in the various manifestations of natural law outlined in Chapter Two, the historical theological discussion of how we might facilitate flourishing in the human community has been rather varied and ambivalent. We now find ourselves, however, in a moment of human unfolding in which we recognize the invitation gently to embrace the exquisite gift of embodiment. In our popular and academic discussions of the body, we are positioned to re-integrate the goodness of the body into our anthropological and moral dialogues. To flourish in this gift requires not only attention to our relationships with the Divine, but also to our relationships with our selves, with one another, and with the world. These varied relationships are no more obvious than in manifestations of human sexualities. The Christian theological tenet of incarnate goodness in the human sexual body - that we are male and female, hetero-, homo-, bi-, and trans-sexual, and experience the world through self-aware sensualities - marks human embodiment as unique in the animal world. God has given to us the capacity knowingly to experience the world through our senses and bodies.

Sexuality, flesh and spirit in intimate communion with others, is the most profound manifestation of our human embodiment. We interact in and through our bodies to experience emotion, thought, sense, spirit, and relationship, which in turn shape meaning in our lives. Our bodily selves are how we touch the world and how the world touches us. Sexuality, both explicitly and implicitly, expresses what those various touches mean. Because each individual experience of human sexuality is unique, we must attend to the particulars of individual experiences to understand their meaning. Because we live in an increasingly global human community, however, we must also determine the value and meaning of those experiences for humanity in general.

For instance, one person's experience of pregnancy requires attention to the details of that particular pregnancy, at all levels of the person's being (i.e., physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, and spiritual). We must also, however, attend to the general reality of a typical pregnancy, what might be common to all (e.g., fetal growth, protruding belly, shifting hormones, umbilical cord, etc.). So human pregnancy is both concrete and particular, and abstract and universal. In the same way that we attend to each individual pregnancy for the good of mother, child, and all persons involved, yet understand pregnancy more universally in order to know to what we must attend, so too must we attend to human sexuality and sexual experience of individuals and of humans in general to understand the good of individual persons.

Attending to both the universal and the particular is the contemporary challenge for theological sexual ethics. Western philosophy has grappled with this tension from its infancy; so too has Christian theology. As noted in Chapter Two, Cristina Traina (1999) has formulated a feminist natural law that is amenable to both the particular and the universal. Noting the dissonance between feminist ethics that focus on the particular and traditional theological ethics that focus on the universal, Traina proposes that the articulation of values and norms as "revisable universals" falls well within the scope of a feminist natural law. For the purposes of my exploration, Traina's formulation of natural law provides a basis for the construction of a sexual ethic attentive to both the concrete particular realities of adolescent females and the more general values and norms that might emerge from a broad study of those realities. In effect, such a theological formulation will attend to the flourishing (sexual and otherwise) of adolescent females in Western, North American cultures. In the light of these questions, I now turn to a synthesis of a feminist natural law theory and accounts of adolescent female realities.

Girls and God: Adolescent Females and a Sexual Theology of Flourishing

Theoretical Framework Revisited

In Cristina Traina's (1999) formulation of feminist natural law, three important factors form the framework for its execution. First is method, "the theoretical structure of ethical argument"; second is procedure, "the practical structure of ethical conversation"; and third is content, "the norms or guides the method develops" (p. 140). Although distinguishable, these aspects of a feminist natural law are interdependent. For a feminist critique of the historical natural law tradition to be successful, it must work from within the natural law tradition at all levels of its expression. To critique or develop method, procedure, or content alone would not yield results amenable to the full flourishing of women in the world. In the following brief sections I will address each of these aspects, with particular regard for the construction of a theological sexual ethic appropriate to adolescent girls.

Theoretical Framework: Method

In distinguishing method within a feminist natural law formulation from an historical natural law formulation, Traina (1999) notes that the feminist formulation is characterized by a method that "must be faithful to women's *critically examined* experiences and thought"; this starting point "yields three important methodological criteria" (p. 141). The first is that the method must be "unified"; it must account for both the social and particular implications of moral stances and behaviours. It would not be acceptable, therefore, to truncate the method by omitting concrete data of individual experiences or to dissipate the method by attending only to the particular. In the light of my project, this implies that the method must take seriously not only what we know and posit theoretically about female adolescence, but must also include the particular experiences of adolescent females in its sexual ethic. Such consideration has not been evident in many formulations of natural law or in the formulation of traditional historical theological sexual ethics. This oversight is particularly true within the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (see, for example, *Humanae Vitae* [Paul VI, 1968] or *Evangelium Vitae,* [John Paul II, 1995a]).

In effect, Traina suggests a method that is equipped for an inductive engagement with empirical data in the formulation of sexual ethics. This possibility meets her second criterion for an adequate method: respect for modes of reasoning unrecognized in the Academy. Because historically natural law theory was formulated within dualistic thinking, and the facets of the dualisms were judged negatively or positively, we found ourselves facing the devaluation of emotion and relational thinking in scholarly discourse. An adequate feminist natural law method will attend to the diverse discourses of moral logic. Traina cites Carol Gilligan's (1993/1982) recognition that moral development might occur among persons through a variety of pathways, some of which have historically been ruled out of court for scholarly consideration. Traina proposes that these non-traditional modes of moral reasoning be factored into feminist natural law. Applied to my project in particular, disciplines that aim to understand the human experience in more specific depth (e.g., developmental psychology) are not only useful but also necessary in an adequate natural law formulation of sexual theology. Data arising from such disciplines, left untouched in theological formulations, will truncate the content as a result of methodological oversight.

Finally, Traina (1999) proposes that an adequate ethic must attend to feminist criteria of truth: "no ethical system that does not promote women's good can be true; nor can it be authentically holy" (p. 144). This methodological criterion is then the criterion of women's flourishing. Both the system and the keepers of the system must attend to the reality of difference among persons for the system itself and the conclusions reached within it to be morally valid. Traina states: "a widely accepted, internally consistent method that privileges men and their styles of moral thinking, or that either disrespects or stunts women and their moral and intellectual development, is almost certainly false. But, more to the point, its practitioners are sinful" (p. 144). This final criterion not only invites diversity of moral thought but also mandates it when systemic oppression riddles inadequate conclusions and thwarts females' flourishing.

Theoretical Framework: Procedure

With method of enquiry established as unified, diverse, and facilitative of women's flourishing, Traina (1999) further suggests that the procedure of carrying out that method is critical to its success. First, the procedure must be genuinely open and participatory, including all voices with a stake in its conclusions. Thus, the hierarchical and patriarchal structure within which Roman Catholic teachings are formulated by default excludes voices and realities of those outside of the formal institutional structure (including women and other oppressed persons). This exclusion is incompatible with a natural law theory that is methodologically open to all available evidence. If the procedure excludes those who might provide evidence outside of the hierarchical or patriarchal norm, then it also excludes the evidence.

> The procedure of exclusion, backed up by an epistemology of privilege, in turn enforced by an ecclesiology of limited charism, thus incapacitates natural law's methodological openness to new information and eventually profoundly distorts both its content and its conduct. This contradiction yields the first procedural criterion: the concrete procedures of moral discourse must be genuinely open and participatory. (Traina, 1999, p. 145)

The second procedural criterion is the advancing of women's moral agency (Traina, 1999, pp. 145-146). By systematically removing women from formal moral discourse, and instead offering universally "right" answers and "correct" behaviours for particular circumstances, historical magisterial ethical formulations have resulted in the creation of unskilled moral reasoners. If natural law is available to all human persons in the course of right reason and prudential reflection, then all moral decision-makers ought equally to be capable of reaching "right" and "correct" answers, preferably communally agreed upon. If the method is to function within a particular communal circumstance, all moral reasoners must be procedurally involved in the consideration and formulation of the ethic itself. To date, such involvement has not been the case not only for women and girls, but for other excluded persons and groups as well.

Finally, Traina (1999) suggests that solidarity in the recognition of a feminist objective of a preferential option for women is also a criterion of procedural efficacy in ethical discourse (pp. 146-147). This criterion requires not just a theoretical but also a practical commitment to women's well-being in both particular and universal circumstances, for instance, in education. This criterion also requires a broad solicitation of women's wisdom and experiences in the world, in order explicitly to manifest commitment to women's flourishing by actually bettering their day-to-day lives. Promulgating theological ethical statements about women, for instance, without procedurally involving them in the discourse, thus contradicts the possibility of an adequate sexual ethic.[2] Further, neither can the voices of women procedurally included themselves be exclusive of women who among all persons are more marginalized structurally. So while theologically trained women might speak to their experiences and participate procedurally, they must also promote the inclusion of females perhaps untrained in scholarly theological discourse, but abundantly educated in the realities of being female. An adequate ethic must not procedurally further oppress already oppressed groups (Traina, 1999, p. 147).

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[2] In discourse addressing male sexist attitudes towards women, two types of sexisms are identified: hostile sexism (which involves sexist antipathy towards women) and benevolent sexism (which involves relatively positive subjective orientation towards women). Based on the criteria formulated in the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), one Spanish study found that Catholic religiosity predicted benevolently sexist attitudes in males towards females (Glick, Lameiras, & Castro, 2002). Benevolent Sexism (BS) is identified as "a traditional ideology that idealizes women in traditional female roles. BS is sexist in that it presumes traditional role divisions and gender stereotypes but consists of subjectively positive (for the sexist man) attitudes toward women (e.g., women complete men, women should be cherished and protected by men)" (Glick, Diebold, Baily-Werner, & Zhu, 1997, p. 1323). Based upon the official Roman Catholic formulation of natural law and its procedural inadequacies as regard women, it is understandable that benevolent sexism pervades

Theoretical Framework: Content

The final aspect of a feminist natural law theory is its content: "the norms, rules, or guidelines, and the rubrics for their application" (Traina, 1999, 147). Here we are dealing with the substantive element of the ethic, the "revisable universals" reached through methodological and procedural attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility to the evidence at hand. This content includes, as Traina (1999) points out, norms rooted in a "thick, vague anthropology" (p. 147), the first criterion of adequate natural law content. This important element is the arbiter of females' flourishing in the world, the yardstick by which we measure the success of the ethical formulation. The rather lengthy following quotation imparts the gravity of our ethical attention to females' flourishing.

> This is a question not merely of abstract metaphysics but of practical inquiry into the requirements of women's flourishing in a particular time and place. Neither an abstract liberal criterion of freedom of choice nor a technical measure of the organic functioning of the body is expansive enough to do the job here. A "thick" description of women's contemporary flourishing includes not just the theoretical freedom to do as we please but the prerequisites for truly free choices: healthy bodies, healthy relationships, and a degree of economic and political security. Sexual and reproductive self-possession, as well as a

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its content and that its commitment to women's flourishing exists outside of the realm of practical, concrete circumstances.

> social position secure enough to enable women truly to choose intercourse, childbirth, or parenting, are thus among the prerequisites for women's flourishing. (Traina, 1999, p. 147)[3]

When we begin to discuss sexual norms (for instance) with due attention to females' bodily realities, the "pure" or "reasonable" normativity predicated on "universal" realities begin to break down from the weight of women's lives. When females speak of their bodies as their own, rather than others speaking to them about their bodies, the content of our ethical formulations are more authentically supportive of females' flourishing (Traina, 1999, p. 148).[4] In light of empirical evidence regarding adolescent females' sexual realities, it seems that the formulations currently existing in the Roman Catholic theological tradition reflect a lacuna of consideration of adolescent females' lives.

The final criterion of content within feminist ethical formulation is that principles derived from authentic methodological and procedural enterprises must serve the ends for which they are discerned: human persons (Traina, 1999, pp. 148-149). When adherence to principles takes precedence over genuine individual moral discernment and human flourishing, then the function of the principles is distorted in the ethical enterprise. For the principles are not meant to shape the moral realities but to guide moral decision-making towards the fullness of well-being with God. When considered in the context of females' flourishing, it would seem that this criterion has not been met in either the history or tradition of official Roman Catholic ethical formulation. Recalling the example in Chapter Two of the woman tied to an abusive partner by incommensurable basic goods and normative marital indissolubility, it is clear that the various criteria within the method, procedure, and content of natural law formulation are incredibly important in the concrete and particular lives of females.

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[3] I am reminded here of Virginia Woolf's (1981/1929) claim in *A Room of One's Own* that to be a writer, a woman needs five hundred pounds a year (in 1928) and a room of her own; a weighty claim in its time.

[4] Patrick McCormick (2003) provides a succinct case in point: "When the U.S. bishops attempted to listen to women in the drafting of their failed pastoral letter (which later appeared in a much modified version), the Vatican short-circuited that conversation, arguing that such consultation was inappropriate. It had been fine to consult military officers on nuclear weapons and corporate executives on capitalism, but not women on sexism. And when Archbishop Rembert Weakland held "listening sessions" with women to hear their thoughts on abortion and other issues the archbishop came under Vatican scrutiny and was disciplined for confusing the faithful. (Weakland, R.G. (1990). Listening sessions on abortion: A response. *Origins, May 31,* 33-42; University of Fribourg (1990). Vatican bars honorary degree for Archbishop Weakland. *Origins, November 22,* 17." (McCormick, 2003, p. 206).

To meet the exigencies for a feminist natural law formulation of an adequate sexual theology for adolescent girls, theologians must attend to the voices of these very females. We must note methodologically the necessity of being open to evidence not previously considered in sexual theological discourse, like developmental psychology and neurology. We must procedurally include the stories and accounts of adolescent females' sexual awareness, desire, intelligence, experience, perception, and bodiliness, like first menstruation and gender development. And we must reflect responsibly on what tentative claims we can make about sexuality and theology in the construction of an appropriate ethic, like what actions might promote sexual flourishing.

Eagle When She Flies: Adolescent Females and Flourishing

Based upon the accounts of adolescent females' lives presented in Chapter Three, I now turn to address flourishing as the measurement of adequacy for a feminist natural law formulation of sexual theology. What are the concrete and tangible sexual realities of adolescent girls? How best do we reflect those realities methodologically, procedurally, and substantively in a feminist natural law formulation of sexual theology? In what way might we facilitate adolescent girls' flourishing in the construction of this theology?

Not a Girl, Not Yet A Woman: Acknowledging Developmental Realities and Female Bodies

The first point of reference for adolescent girls' development is the body. What do we know theoretically and practically about the bodies of adolescent females and the culture(s) in which they develop? How have theologies historically accounted for adolescent and adult female bodies? Based upon the substance of the previous two chapters, I propose three topics for consideration here.

Jack and Diane: Gender and Complementarity

The first topic is gender and the notion of complementarity. Gender development theory (see Chapter 3) provides a helpful account of how genders (feminine and masculine, primarily) develop in accord with (or not) biological sex. Bussey and Bandura's (1999) socio-cognitive theory of the development of gender that meets (or defies) gender-role norms over the course of development posits that gender and sex are differentiated by culture and body respectively. They further posit that, although sex and gender are mutually interactive, sex is not solely responsible for gender identification. Rather, the multifaceted interaction of factors such as biology, nurturing, social experience, and cultural milieu generally creates movement through a more dynamic than static gender identity. For adolescent females, in particular, research has shown how difficult the negotiation of gender can be. While this negotiation is also difficult for adolescent males, it seems that they do not suffer the same negative mental health consequences as girls for being gender atypical (e.g., lower self-esteem, less perceived self-efficacy and agency, disordered eating, depression) (Egan & Perry, 2001). It would seem, therefore, that evidence regarding gender is pointing to the personal and social nature of gender development and the potentially hurtful consequences of ascribing to proscribed social categories regarding gender and gender-role expression. As Basow (2006) notes, broadening our notions of gender might create a social context in which persons "can truly flourish and achieve their maximal psychological health" (p. 250).

Gender development is thus an element of human flourishing. When socially proscribed gender roles do not match a person's self-perception of gender, there can be impediments to flourishing. In theological discourse on sex and sexuality, this issue is hotly debated (see Chapter 2). On the one hand, there are those, including Pope John Paul II (1997 & 1988), the new feminists, and the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, who would conflate sex and gender into traditional historical gender roles, salted with hints of dualisms and patriarchy. In theoretical terms, the official formulations of male/female and masculine/feminine seem to support a form of benevolent sexism within the understanding of sex and gender as complementary (See Note 2, above). That is, the attitude of males towards females is not necessarily one of antipathy, but rather one of affection for and protection of women, particularly for women embodying traditional feminine gender roles (see Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997; Glick & Fiske, 1996; and Glick, Lameiras, & Castro 2002).[5] Drawing on long-standing gender and sex stereotypes based on the dualisms and on the image of Mary[6] in the service of others, the primary place for women is in the role of mother and nurturer.[7] While chastising social structures that are socio-economically oppressive of women and complimenting women on their wholesale movement into the professional realms of Western cultures, the Roman Catholic Church cautions against the besmirching of women's more noble nature to serve in love (termed the "genius of women" or the "feminine genius"[8]) with the adoption of masculine characteristics (CDF, 2004; Pope John Paul II, 1995b).

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[5] An interesting contemporary manifestation of this attitude is found in the "Purity Ball" movement within some evangelical Christian churches. The premise of the Ball is sexual abstinence until marriage: the father takes a pledge to "cover" his pubertal daughter "as her authority and protection in the area of purity", and the daughter (as young as 10 years of age), princess for the day, pledges her purity until marriage. They often exchange purity rings or a locket with a key the father protects until the daughter's marriage. There is no equivalent for adolescent males. (See www.generationsoflight.myicontrol.com/generationsoflight.html/PurityBall.html).

[6] There is a long and extensive Marian theological tradition developing Mary's role in the Church as the virgin mother of God. Although an interesting branch of theological thought (particularly in the Roman Catholic context), Mariology is far too broad to consider in this dissertation.

[7] "In this perspective of "service" – which, when it is carried out with freedom, reciprocity and love, expresses the truly "royal" nature of mankind [sic] – one can also appreciate that the presence of *a certain diversity of roles* is in no way prejudicial to women, provided that this diversity is not the result of an arbitrary imposition, but is rather an expression of what is specific to being male and female. This issue also has a particular application within the Church. If Christ – by his free and sovereign choice, clearly attested to by the Gospel and by the Church's constant Tradition – entrusted only to men the task of being an *"icon" of his countenance as "shepherd" and "bridegroom" of the Church through the exercise of the ministerial priesthood,* this in no way detracts from the role of women, or for that matter from the role of the other members of the Church who are not ordained to the sacred ministry, since *all* share equally in the dignity proper to the *"common priesthood"* based on Baptism. These role distinctions should not be viewed in accordance with the criteria of functionality typical in human societies. Rather they must be understood according to the particular criteria of the *sacramental economy,* i.e., the economy of "signs" which God freely chooses in order to become present in the midst of humanity.

"Furthermore, precisely in line with this economy of signs, even if apart from the sacramental sphere, there is great significance to that "womanhood" which was lived in such a sublime way by Mary. In fact, there is present in the "womanhood" of a woman who believes, and especially in a woman who is "consecrated", a kind of inherent "prophecy" (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem,* 29), a powerfully evocative symbolism, a highly significant "iconic character", which finds its full realization in Mary and which also aptly expresses the very essence of the Church as a community consecrated with the integrity of a *"virgin"* heart to become the *"bride"* of Christ and *"mother"* of believers. When we consider the "iconic" complementarity of male and female roles, two of the Church's essential dimensions are seen in a clearer light: the "Marian" principle and the Apostolic-Petrine principle (cf. *ibid.,* 27) (emphases original) (John Paul II, 1995b, n. 11).

On the other hand, there are those, including numerous feminist theologians (e.g., Cahill, 1996; Coakley, 2002; Coll, 1994; O'Neill, 1993; Farley, 2006; Ruether, 1983), who would posit the social creation of gender and the biological reality of sex as significant factors in the oppression of women in the Church and in the world (see Chapter 2). Rather than rely on a theological anthropology of complementarity that would confine men and women to Magisterium-sanctioned gender roles and identities, these theologians posit that the participation of women in the world reaches beyond a feminine genius of reproductivity and service to others. This feminist critique of the benevolent sexism pervasive in official and historical understandings of sex and gender is precisely aimed at facilitating the flourishing of females. In recognition of the importance of particular realities and manifestations of sex and gender in individual lives, it seems hardly helpful to say to a curious lesbian fifteen year old that her inherent genius as a female is to complement a male. In fact, empirical evidence regarding gender identity formation and mental health suggests that, particularly for adolescent females, such a suggestion could be detrimental to her flourishing (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thompson, 2000; Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2005). The conflation of sex and gender, coupled with a formulation of gender development void of concrete and particular realities of adolescent females, effectively objectifies adolescent females and locates all sexual meaning in their reproductive bodies. Further, this objectification within a hetero-normative assumption requires that females be feminine (in some externally defined way), regardless of their own perceptions and experiences of sex and gender.

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[8] *"The Church sees in Mary the highest expression of the "feminine genius"* and she finds in her a source of constant inspiration. Mary called herself the "handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1:38). Through obedience to the Word of God she accepted her lofty yet not easy vocation as wife and mother in the family of Nazareth. Putting herself at God's service, she also put herself at the service of others: *a service of love*. Precisely through this service Mary was able to experience in her life a mysterious, but authentic "reign". It is not by chance that she is invoked as "Queen of heaven and earth". The entire community of believers thus invokes her; many nations call upon her as their "Queen". *For her, "to reign" is to serve! Her service is "to reign"* (italics original) (John Paul II, 1995b; see also John Paul II, 1995c).

Returning to Traina's analysis of method and procedure for making tentative claims about the substance of feminist natural law ethics, we must ask if a hetero-normative notion of sex and gender complementarity is capable of facilitating the full flourishing of females, in general, and developing adolescent girls, in particular. In a strange twist of theory, the objectification of the female body (and possible resulting self-objectification) within a theology of complementarity, rather than overtly sexualizing females' bodies by casting off all cover and protection (APA, 2007), seems covertly to asexualize them by donning the guise of genius, rather than attending to experiential realities. Powerful examples of such inattention are menarche, menstruation, and pleasure; to recognize female bleeding and sexual enjoyment is inherently to recognize the practical reality of female sexuality. Rather than speaking to female experience, complementarity defines female sexuality only in relation to males, in vague terms and with no reference to pleasure. Female sexual experience is thus glossed over and tucked away from theological discourse.

In this sense, the method itself is truncated: it is heedless of the wisdom garnered by attending to the actual experiences of adolescent females and removes from them their collective and individual subjective voices. Girls will be (feminine) girls; boys will be (masculine) boys. The convergence here of gender development, complementarity, and objectification theories suggests that the theological anthropology informing historical teachings on males and females diminishes rather than facilitates adolescent females' flourishing.

Hips Don't Lie: Adolescent Female Bodies

The second developmental topic for consideration is the biological/physical realities of adolescent girls and their sexual experiences of their bodies.[9] Contemporary Western culture has focused on the biological realities (narrowly perceived) of adolescent development with little attention to concomitant developmental factors. Menarche, the explicit moment of introduction to female sexuality and maturity, and menstruation have become less about the physiological, emotional, and psychological transition into and manifestation of womanhood, and more about an hygienic inconvenience that must be hidden and kept secret (see Chapter 3). Female bodies are sexually objectified from childhood on and are closely monitored for size, beauty, normativity, and attractiveness to the opposite sex. Young girls (and women) are targeted as consumers of products aimed at preserving youthful and socially sanctioned bodies (APA, 2007), while social recognition of healthy adolescent sexuality eludes them.

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[9] In conversation with a female friend, she recounted how her mother had spoken with her about sexuality. She had said to her daughter that, physically, she would be ready to let someone be close to her much sooner than she would be ready to let someone be close to her emotionally and psychologically. Her mother advised her that sexual activity involved all of those aspects of her person, so that she ought to be mindful not just of the physical reality of sexual interaction with another, but also of the emotional and psychological aspects. My friend, as an adolescent, understood that her mother was telling her to wait for sex until she was fully ready. Numerous empirical studies support the notion that the later an adolescent debuts sexually, the more likely is their experience to be perceived positively, and her/his ensuing life choices to reflect positive cognitive, affective, and relational integration of her/his experience (e.g., Armour & Haynie, 2006; Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2005).

Empirical evidence suggests that adolescent females experience the negative realities of sexuality in great numbers. For instance, first coitus (i.e., heterosexual intercourse) remains an ambivalent experience for adolescent females. Factors such as the context of first intercourse, sexual messages and values received from parents, gender beliefs, and feelings about the body all contribute to how first intercourse is perceived (Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2005). Sharon Thompson's (1990) oft-cited study of teenage girls' accounts of sexual initiation recounts a frequent "cognitive gap" between their biological understanding of sexual intercourse and their experiential preparedness for the event. With no foreground conversation about how intercourse actually feels (physically, emotionally, relationally) many girls interpreted their experience against a fantasy of heterosexual intercourse. Thus they reported boredom, pain, coercion, disappointment, and dissociation as primary characteristics of first sex (Thompson, 1990). In response to their negative first experience, numerous girls postponed further coitus until they were more comfortable with both the idea and the reality. Thompson (1990) also found, however, that approximately 25% of females in her study reported a more encouraging experience of sexual development and activity. This finding corresponded with those within Michelle Fine's (1988) influential study of alternative discourses of adolescent females' sexual experiences; evidence suggested that at least some girls experienced sexual desire, sexual experience, and sexual intercourse in a more positive light.

This evidence further suggests that adolescent females are capable of attending to and flourishing in their own sexuality when the context is favourable to positive perceptions of female adolescent sexuality. Recalling Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, and Merriwether's (2005) study of factors that contribute to positive first consensual intercourse (both male and female), context, parental messages, gender ideology, and body satisfaction all contribute to perception of first intercourse. As expected with regard to context, women reported that when first sexual intercourse was intentional and planned, when a longer period of time had passed in the relationship with their partner, when they were older, and when they used contraception, the experience was more positively perceived. With regard to the impact of parental messages on experiential perceptions, women who received more positive messages about sexual freedom that did not endorse a sexual double standard between males and females perceived their experience more positively. For women, ascription to traditional gender roles led to a more negative experience of first intercourse, while for men, the opposite was true. Finally, the more comfortable women were with their bodies at the time of first intercourse, the more positively they reported the experience (pp. 49-52).

It seems that framing adolescent sexuality in a primarily negative light, within a discourse of female victimization (Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1990), in fact is a detriment to adolescent girls' sexual flourishing. Initially, their sexuality is negatively framed by a social introduction to menstruation that emphasizes hiding, secrecy, and uncleanliness. As further evidence suggests, adolescent females, in particular, regularly encounter the discourse of female risk regarding sexual engagement. Evidence also suggests that the reality of female risk regarding adolescent sexual behaviours is fueled by hetero-normative assumptions regarding sexuality and their related gender messages. For example, Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, and Thomson (2000) point out the gender differences regarding perceptions of sexual virginity and the loss thereof. Males are markedly more positive about their experiences because the loss of virginity is framed within a masculine construction of sexual meaning: the initiation of manhood (see also Dickson, Paul, Herbison, & Silva, 1998; Guggino and Ponzetti, 1997). However, researchers also found that awareness and grappling with this particular sexual construction made the sexual experience more positive for both males and females:

> Where young people have more negotiated relationships, or are influenced by feminism (particularly mothers), then there is a greater awareness of the possibility of differences between male and female experience. Intimacy, friendship, love and an equality of inexperience can create space for resisting the dominance of masculine meanings and the surveillance of the male peer group. Being able to laugh together at inexperience, rather than her having the power to laugh at him; exploring desires together, rather than her being expected to service his, requires some initial deconstruction of masculinity or outmanoeuvring of heterosexual pressures. (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thompson, 2000, p. 227)

Thus a positive framework for a discourse of female adolescent sexuality ought to include some deconstruction of traditional gender roles, heteronormativity, female bleeding, and male sexual privilege (Diamond, 2006; Tolman, 2006).

These are a Few of My Favourite Things: Positive Construction of Adolescent Female Sexuality

As Fine (1988), Phillips (1998), Thompson (1990), and Tolman (2006 & 2002a) point out, there is more to a positive discourse of adolescent sexuality than deconstruction; all agree that deconstructing sexuality in general from its focus on male-privileged, heterosexual normativity is necessary to understand why recognition and expression of adolescent female sexuality can be dangerous (or at least lacking in pleasure). These researchers further call for a reconstruction that explores female sexuality in a positive light. Researchers identify a number of factors as pivotal in constructing a positive perception of adolescent female sexual development. Each of these factors contributes to an understanding of adolescent female sexual flourishing and thus contributes to the content in the formulation of a feminist natural law ethic of adolescent sexuality.

Because You Loved Me: Parental Influences on Positive Adolescent Sexuality.

The first factor deemed pivotal in positive sexual development among adolescents is parental support and positive messaging about sexuality and sexual behaviour (Miller, Norton, Fan, & Christopherson, 1998; Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2005). For adolescent girls, their relationships with and the education level of their mothers seem to bear significantly on their sexual attitudes and behaviours (Abma, Driscoll, & Moore, 1998; Houts, 2005). Numerous studies have found that close monitoring of activity by parents, a warm and close mother-daughter relationship, and ease of communication between mother and daughter facilitate delayed intercourse and enhance self-esteem and sexual-agency among adolescent girls (McNeely, Shew, Beuhring, Sieving, Miller, & Blum, 2002; Schreck, 1999; Sieving, McNeely, & Blum, 2000). Aspy, Vesely, Oman, Rodine, Marshall, and McLeroy (2007) found that the quality and quantity of the communication and the quality of the existing relationship between adolescents aged 13-17 and parents (notably, mothers) mediate the effectiveness of discussions of sexuality between parents and children (see also Lefkowitz & Stoppa, 2006). The data clearly suggest that parental involvement in child and adolescent sexual education, an open and loving relationship between parent and child, and accurate and caring information about sexuality as a multi-faceted human experience are beneficial to adolescent sexual development and flourishing (see also Blake, Simkin, Ledsky, Perkins, & Calabrese, 2001; Maguen & Armistead, 2006).

Such a relationship includes the parental capacity to facilitate positive influences in sexual development and to mediate an adolescent's understanding and experience of sexuality within a complex social environment. Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, and Dintcheff (2007) found that actual time spent among the family is enough to protect young adolescents from engaging in sexual activity and to a certain extent mediate the extensive time that adolescents spend with peers. Such parental time and influence provide a context for meaningful critique of persuasive social messages about body image, sexual behaviour, and self-esteem, all critical factors in healthy adolescent female sexual development. Parents are uniquely positioned to address external influences on sexual development, such as television messages (Schooler, Kim & Sorsoli, 2006; Sorsoli, Porche, & Tolman, 2005).

A prominent example of external influence on adolescent sexuality is the mass media (Brown, 2000; Brown, Halpern, & L'Engle, 2005; Ward, 2003). Studies are beginning to establish not only a link (Gruber & Grube, 2000; Kaestle, Halpern, & Brown, 2007; Ward & Friedman, 2006) but also a causal effect of the sexual content within mass media on the sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescents (Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy, & Jackson 2006; Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter, & Miu, 2004). Interestingly, these data show that depictions of sexual activity, consequences, abstinence, birth control, emotions, gender relationships, and healthy sexual choices will influence adolescents both to refrain from and to engage in sexual activities (e.g., depictions of negative consequences of sexual behaviours discourage sexual activity, while depictions of no consequences of sexual behaviours encourage sexual activity) (Collins et al., 2004; Ward, Day, & Epstein, 2006). Hence the content of media messages about sexuality are as influential as their mere presence. Unfortunately, portrayals of healthy adolescent sexuality are sparse in the mass media (Kunkel, Eyal, Finnerty, Biely, & Donnerstein, 2005; Strasburger, 2005). Parents' participation in their adolescents' sexual media diets (i.e., their choice and ingestion of, interaction with, and application of sexual media content), combined with critical media literacy, can positively affect the choices their adolescents make for a healthy sexuality (Brown, 2000; Collins et al, 2004).[10]

Anything You Can Do: Activities and Goals.

A second pivotal factor in the development of healthy sexuality among adolescent girls is their participation in extra-curricular activities and academic goals. One particular focus of research regarding the relationship between adolescent girls' extra-curricular activities and their sexual attitudes and behaviours is athletic involvement. The factors that mediate the relationship between adolescent female athletes and their sexual attitudes and behaviours are undeniably complex (age, parental relationships, socio-economic status, race, sexual orientation, and self-esteem, for example). While the links among these factors are apparent, the directionality of their interaction seems yet to be firmly identified. It is not clear if athletic heterosexual adolescent females are choosing behaviours that are protective of sexual health (i.e., they are considered desirable among their male peers, but choose to be sexually active at lower rates than their non-athletic peers) or if their athletic involvement itself contributes to a lack of opportunity to explore sexuality (i.e., they are stigmatized as undesirable to their male peers precisely because of their athletic involvement and, therefore, their lower rates of sexual behaviour are by default rather than by choice).[11] However, the generally positive relationship between adolescent girls' involvement in athletics[12] and avoiding risky sexual behaviour (e.g., intercourse without contraception), seeking healthy sexual behaviour (e.g., later sexual initiation), and sexual/reproductive health (e.g., intercourse with contraception) seems well-established. One obviously measurable outcome of this relationship is fewer adolescent pregnancies among athletic girls than their non-athletic peers (Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Lehman & Koerner, 2004; Sabo, Miller, Farrell, Melnick, & Barnes, 1999; Savage & Holcomb, 1999).

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[10] There are a number of websites available whose goals are to foster media literacy among females regarding pervasive sexual messages and to instill a healthy critical stance towards those messages. For example: Mind on the Media (www.motm.org), Girls, Women + Media Project (www.mediaandwomen.org), Girls Inc (www.girlsinc.org), The Media Education Foundation (www.mediaed.org); Media Watch (www.mediawatch.com), The Action Coalition for Media Education (www.acmecoalition.org) (Brashich, 2006); See Jane (www.seejane.org), About-Face (www.about-face.org), Teen Media (www.unc.edu/depts/jomc/teenmedia).

Athletic involvement is only one of numerous activities that seem to protect for healthy general development. Adolescent involvement in any type of extra-curricular activity is linked to pro-social development and long-term personal and professional success. Eccles, Barber, Stone, and Hunt (2003) found that adolescent involvement in constructive, non-academic activities, whether school or community structured, facilitated greater school engagement and academic achievement. These activities provide "opportunities to engage in challenging tasks that promote learning of valued skills", "form strong social bonds with non-familial adults and prosocial peers", and "develop and confirm positive identities" (p. 885). Although the direction of effect is unclear from this particular study, other studies suggest a bidirectional relationship between school related goals and achievements and prosocial behaviours. Schvaneveldt, Miller, Berry, and Lee (2001) found this bidirectional effect in their study of the relationship between age at first sexual intercourse (a potential risk behaviour) and academic goals and achievements. Their longitudinal study found evidence that low educational achievement and goals (including parents' educational expectations) predicted for earlier sexual initiation; this finding was particularly strong for early adolescent black females. It was also found, however, that earlier age of first intercourse itself predicted for lower longer-term academic achievement and goals. Thus extra-curricular activities and long-term academic goals and expectations contribute to adolescent girls' sexual self-perceptions, which in turn allow them to envision goals that might be impeded by early heterosexual intercourse. If the activities and goals themselves both contribute to girls' self-esteem and agency, and reduce available discretionary peer-time (known to predict for risk behaviours among peers) (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2007), then we could conclude that they are positive factors in adolescent girls' flourishing.

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[11] The findings of Miller, Farrell, Barnes, Melnick, and Sabo (2005) suggest that athletic adolescent girls engage in sexual behaviours, or abstain from them, as a matter of choice rather than as a matter of non-desirable default.

[12] The objective measurement of athletic activity, as opposed to the subjective understanding of the self as a "jock" seems to be an important distinction in the exploration of sexual attitudes and behaviour. Miller, Farrell, Barnes, Melnick, and Sabo (2005) note that self-identification as a "jock", rather than actual athletic activity, predicted for higher sexual risk-taking behaviours, particularly among African-American males. They speculate that the disparity between objective athleticism and subjective perception of jock identity could enlighten the consideration of adolescent sexual risk.

Like a Virgin: Norms, Values, and Beliefs.

A third pivotal factor in adolescent girls' healthy sexual development, strongly related to the previous two factors (i.e., parental influence, and extra-curricular activities and academic goals), is the structure of sexual meaning in girls' lives: how norms, values, and religious beliefs contribute to the healthy sexual development of adolescent females. Norms, socially determined standards for behaviour, inform adolescents' perceptions of themselves as sexual, in particular, in relation to their peers. When adolescents subjectively perceive themselves to be older than their chronological age, they tend to adopt behaviours they associate with older persons (e.g., late adolescents and young adults) (Arbeau, Galambos, & Jansson, 2007). When they understand sexual intercourse as normative for older persons, adolescents can be drawn by the incentive of pseudo-maturity to initiate sexual activity in early adolescence. They might also initiate sexual activity as a result of their perception that their peers will also be sexually active, regardless of whether or not that is the case (Kinsman, Romer, Furstenberg, & Schwarz, 1998; Rosenthal, Smith, & Visser, 1999). Because earlier sexual initiation is a predictor for sexually related health issues (e.g., STIs, unplanned pregnancy, violence and abuse), it would seem that the delay of sexual intercourse is an outcome favourable to adolescent female flourishing.

Interestingly, the inverse is also true: when delayed sexual intercourse is understood as normative among adolescents, it also is a predictor of sexual initiation. When delay of sexual initiation is normatively reinforced among adolescents, this psychosocial factor predicts for such a delay (Carvajal, Parcel, Basen-Engquist, Banspach, Coyle, Kirby, & Chan, 1999; Santelli, Kaiser, Hirsch, Radosh, Simkin, & Middlestadt, 2004). In conjunction with other psychosocial factors, such as parental engagement, media influences, and extra-curricular engagement, social reinforcement of delayed sexual initiation as normative among adolescents is a protective factor in the flourishing of adolescent girls.

Social norms do not develop in a vacuum. Much of what we consider to be sexually normative in North American culture has been influenced by Judeo-Christian religious values and beliefs. While only one aspect among many having an impact on adolescents' sexual decision-making, still, religious beliefs hold influential sway in their lives. For example, Sinha, Cnaan, and Gelles (2007) found that more than participation in worship and affiliation to a particular tradition, professed religious belief about sexual activity predicted negatively for participation in risk activities, including sex (see also Meier, 2003). Further extensive studies have found that religiosity more broadly perceived (i.e., identity, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, and practices regarding religion) also has an impact upon adolescent engagement in health risk behaviours in general (e.g., substance use) (Abbott-Chapman & Denholm, 2001; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2003), and sexual health risk behaviours in particular (e.g., unprotected intercourse) (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003; Holder, Durant, Harris, Daniel, Obeidallah, & Goodman, 2000; Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, & Randall, 2004). The most consistent finding regarding religiosity and sexual behaviour is the delay of sexual initiation among adolescent females. Such a delay predicts for more positive sexual development of females from adolescence into adulthood because it protects for long-term sexual and psychological health, academic and social achievement, and general health and flourishing. In the light of our understanding of physiological and neural development in adolescents, it seems congruent that the delay of sexual intercourse into late adolescence or early adulthood would provide for more skill in dealing with its multi-faceted implications.

Closely linked to religiosity as an influence on sexual decision-making is the phenomenon of public "virginity" pledges: "[adolescents] promise to abstain from sex until marriage" (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001, pp. 851-52).[13] A conflation of belief and normativity, the virginity pledge hopes to instill not only sexual continence among its pledgers but also to encourage abstinence from all "unpure" activities. Bersamin, Walker, Waiters, Fisher, and Grube (2005) found, however, that the public pledging activity was less a factor in maintaining sexual abstinence than was a private pledge that more accurately reflected adolescents' personal attitudes, beliefs, and intentions regarding sexual intercourse. Thus, personal beliefs were more predictive of ongoing abstinence than was public pledging.

In a broad longitudinal study of abstinence pledgers, Bearman and Bruckner (2001) followed up on the attitudes and behaviours of adolescents who previously had pledged. Incorporating studies of identity movements, Bearman and Bruckner found that pledgers did substantially delay intercourse, particularly among younger adolescents (the average delay ranged from 27 to 38 months, depending on the demographic group) (2001). They also found, however, interesting social predictors for the profiles of pledgers, their identification with the movement, and the environmental factors affecting the success of the pledge movement. First, the more pubertally developed, cognitively able, and experienced at dating an adolescent is, the less likely that he/she will pledge: "pledgers tend to be more religious, from more normative backgrounds, and less physically developed than their non-pledging peers" (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001, p. 909). Second, the more effectively the pledging movement creates a community of identity, for example, by the use of various pledging paraphernalia (e.g., pledge rings, bracelets, books), the more successful the pledgers will be at maintaining abstinence. Bearman and Bruckner found that individual public pledgers living outside of a visible pledging community were less successful at maintaining abstinence. Finally, they found that the pledging effect has a threshold of about 40%. That is, once a community of pledgers reaches approximately 40% of the entire population (e.g., 40% of students in a particular school), then the identity effect collapses and the protective factor of the pledge begins to decline. The pledge identity requires an element of non-normativity for its success: "the community is effective only if it has self-conscious recognition, which presumes minority status" (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001, p. 901).

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[13] Along with the aforementioned "Purity Ball", described above in note 5, are the less extravagant expressions of the virginity pledge. See, for example, the *True Love Waits* approach: "Created by LifeWay Christian Resources, True Love Waits is designed to encourage moral purity by adhering to biblical principles. This youth-based international campaign utilizes positive peer pressure by encouraging those who make a commitment to refrain from pre-marital sex to challenge their peers to do the same" (Retrieved October 3, 2007, http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/).

While the success of delayed intercourse for adolescent females is clearly a benefit of the pledging phenomenon, this benefit seems to be lost when it comes to the transmission of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). In a third wave follow-up to their previous study, Bruckner and Bearman (2005) undertook a comparison examination of rates of STIs among pledgers and non-pledgers. While pledgers indeed delayed sexual debut about 2-3 years longer than their non-pledging peers, and married younger than their non-pledging peers, most did eventually engage in pre-marital vaginal intercourse. Startlingly, however, pledgers, whether married or not, contracted STIs at about the same rate as non-pledgers. Despite having fewer sexual partners and fewer opportunities for sexual intercourse, pledgers test positive for STIs as consistently as non-pledgers. Thus, although abstinence as an ideal for pre-marital sexual activity seems to work to reduce sexual risk among early adolescent pledgers, it cannot alone be considered an effective strategy for promoting life-long flourishing and sexual health.

While norms, values, and religious beliefs do affect sexual decision-making among adolescents, the social context in which they exist also contributes to their efficacy in promoting sexual health. The realities of community, non-conformity, identity, and relational development mitigate the ways in which adolescents identify and integrate social and parental values and norms into their own structures of meaning. Knowing that adolescents are strongly committed to exploring their identities in relation to their parents, community, and peers means that adult attempts to inculcate in young people the norms, values, and beliefs of existing social groups is precarious business. Although as adults we might have insight and wisdom into the benefits of, for instance, sexual abstinence among early adolescents, to articulate that to them in a meaningful way requires inter-relational respect, attention to social factors, and a long-term commitment to human sexual flourishing. Clearly, a promulgation of rules for expected sexual behaviour is no guarantee of respect for and a capacity to maintain said rules.

What a Girl Wants: The Pleasure and Danger of Desire

One final factor pivotal in the healthy sexual development of adolescent girls is desire; while a seemingly internal emotional experience of sexuality, desire is actually profoundly shaped by the socio-political context in which it is experienced. The importance of the phenomenon of desire in adolescent females' sexual perceptions and experiences warrants its consideration at length, in its own section. The highly politically-charged discussion of desire in adolescent females is reminiscent of the ways in which females' sexualities in general have been rendered taboo in the evolution of Western culture in general, and in theological sexual ethics in particular. Its extensive consideration here introduces the parallel dearth of engagement with female sexuality in the evolution of theological discourse. The importance of this lack of representation is evidenced in the need for a sexual theology more attentive to female sexualities: the correction of this lack will form the substance of my final discussion.

In 1988, Michelle Fine critiqued the typical American sexual education experience as perpetuating an anti-sex and victimizing account of adolescent female sexuality. Countering the discourse of victimization in sexual education, Fine identified what she termed the "missing discourse of desire" with regard to girls' sexuality. By focusing sex education solely on the negative outcomes of (hetero)sexual activity, the curricula were by default excluding discourse about the inherently positive character of sexuality in general.[14] In so glossing over the possibility that adolescent sexuality might be more ambiguous in its experience than merely negative, many protective factors for adolescent girls' healthy sexual development were lost. Fine thus proposed that a discourse of desire become central to sexual education and, in particular, to sexual education among adolescent females.

In 2006, almost twenty years after her initial proposal regarding a discourse of desire, Fine returned to sexual education programs in the United States. She and Sara McClelland (2006) investigated the impact of abstinence-only, nationally-funded sexual education programs on adolescent sexual development and health. Having found little progress with regard to the implementation of a discourse of desire, and having found evidence to suggest that the people most negatively affected by abstinence-only education and subsequent policies are those young people already socially marginalized (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, immigrant, undocumented, and women with disabilities), Fine and McClelland proposed a more refined take on desire as a "friendly amendment" to Fine's 1988 essay (2006, p. 300). They suggest that, to address the missing discourse of desire in its own environment (i.e., to understand the broader context in which females' sexual desire is situated), a "framework of *thick desire*" is required:

> Young people are entitled to a broad range of desires for meaningful intellectual, political, and social engagement, the possibility of financial independence, sexual and reproductive freedom, protection from racialized and sexualized violence, and a way to imagine living

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[14] One is reminded, again, of the negative Western social construction of menarche (and menstruation), females' bodily introduction to their sexual selves (see Chapter Three). The initial negative perception of female sexuality is reinforced by inattention to female sexual desire that is not itself connected to heterosexual male satisfaction.

> in the future tense… We understand that young women's thick desires require a set of publicly funded enabling conditions, in which teen women have opportunities to: (a) develop intellectually, emotionally, economically, and culturally; (b) imagine themselves as sexual beings capable of pleasure and cautious about danger without carrying the undue burden of social, medical, and reproductive consequences; (c) have access to information and health-care resources; (d) be protected from structural and intimate violence and abuse; and (e) rely on a public safety net of resources to support youth, families, and community. (Fine & McClelland, 2006, 300-301)

Most notably, Fine and McClelland are committed to exploring *thick desire* in the "embodied intersections" where young women and girls live; in their racial, gendered, economic, social, and political situations that yield sexual experiences that are at once pleasurable and dangerous. Not unlike Traina's (1999) thesis that any adequate ethical consideration of women's experiences must start within a *thick telic anthropology* that provides a preferential option for females in the broader circumstances of their actual lives, Fine and McClelland's thesis posits that any adequate sexual education for adolescent females must address their *thick desire*. That is, it must address a contextual analysis of their embodied sexual realities. Recognizing the politics that undergird the current state of sexuality education in the United States, Fine and McClelland (2007) suggest that abstinence-only sexuality education (or any other model that limits females' sexual realities) in fact does more harm to females than good.

Although Fine and McClelland's return to the discourse of desire found American sexuality education wanting, in the wake of Fine's 1988 identification of the missing discourse of desire, numerous researchers (particularly feminist and female scholars) have taken up the task of investigating the reality of adolescent girls' sexual desires. Deborah Tolman's (2005, 2002a, 2000, 1994) extensive attempts to capture the voices of adolescent girls in their expression of sexual desire have nudged our formulation of female adolescent sexuality into a positive framework. Responding to an historical construction of adolescent female sexuality as problematic and corresponding research focusing on behaviours and outcomes, Tolman (2002b, 1999) and other researchers (Harris, 2005; Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2005) are attending to a broader, more contextual construction of adolescent girls' sexualities. In exploring female adolescent sexual desires, recent research has unearthed evidence of the profound ambiguity of sexuality, sexual experience, and adolescent sexual development.

A first notable reality as regards sexual desire among adolescent girls is its complexity in and of itself. For females in general, sexual desire has historically been constructed as sexual desirability for males.[15] As Tolman points out, the gendered social construction of femininity "encourages girls and women to be desirable but not desiring" (2002a, p. 115). In such an historical context, girls who have internalized the objectification of themselves as desirable to males tend to associate their own desire with their desire to please males, because prominent social gender constructs consider female sexual desire anathema. In its most blatant expression, the objectification of the desirable sexual adolescent female is located in the commodification of female sexuality in an economy of market profit. Taken one step further, when a discourse of adolescent female sexual desire *is* articulated, it is also vulnerable to being co-opted into the market economy:

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[15] Parallel to the social construction of female sexual desire is its biomedical conceptualization based upon a male standard of sexual desire, within a linear model of sexual response, subject to biological reductionism, depoliticized, and subject to the medicalization of variation. A feminist critique of these features might yield a more integrated and female-focused conceptualization of actual female sexual desire (Wood, Koch, & Mansfield, 2006).

> Images and discourses of young women's sexual desire are commodified and sold back to them through fashion, beauty and lifestyle products, music and accessories. In this way, the articulation of the missing discourse of desire has enabled the constitution of young women as consumer citizens, and at the same time it produces them as new kinds of desiring subjects of, and desirable objects for, (hetero)-sexual consumption. (Harris, 2005, p. 40)

Thus the discourse of sexual desire among adolescent females is as potentially confounding as its silence. As Harris (2005) points out, when eliciting a discourse of desire we must take pains to ensure a safe space for its elucidation and a welcoming social context for its expression.

This complexity highlights social construction as a second notable reality regarding adolescent female sexual desire. In examining the role of gender in the construction of sexual desire, Tolman (2002a, 2002b, 1999) points out that "femininity" itself can be a barrier to the sexual health of adolescent females. Placing gender assumptions that diminish women's capacity and agency in all realms of health at the forefront of her interpretive framework, Tolman recognizes that social heteronormativity in turn places women at a disadvantage regarding sexual desire. That is, sexual females are perceived dichotomously as either virgins (non-desiring) or whores (desiring).[16] Such a dichotomy places females who have internalized gender femininity in a double bind. If they do not acknowledge their own sexual desire, they are by default assumed to be the object of male sexual desire. If they do acknowledge their own sexual desire, they are negatively stigmatized outside of dominant social roles. Because ascription to proscribed gender roles can be harmful to adolescent girls' sexual development (as noted in Chapter 3), their automatic identification with "femininity" may in fact hinder and harm their healthy sexuality (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Tolman, 2002a & 2000).

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[16] Witness this construction in the Christian (particularly Roman Catholic) tradition in the persons of the two Marys: Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ/God, and Mary Magdalene, the Prostitute Disciple of Jesus. This dichotomy holds sway in the official Church understanding of complementarity of the sexes/genders as male/masculine/active and female/feminine/receptive.

One manifestation of social construction of gender and females' inability to articulate their sexual desires is the gap between "want" and "get" in sexual satisfaction.[17] Although popular social discourse might suggest that females' sexual agency has progressed significantly into the twenty-first century, still the gendered realities of female sexual desires prevail in Western cultures. In her exploration of the "gap between desired and lived heterosexual relationships in the 21st century", Sieg (2007) concludes that females are still willing to accept the deferral of their own desires for the fulfillment of their male partners' desires. And they accept this situation based on a common assumption of male-female relationship and socially constructed gender roles (i.e., males cannot control their sexual desires and thus must have their needs and wants met regardless of females' needs and wants). Phillips (2000) terms this assumption the "male sexual drive discourse" (pp. 57-61), which "tells us that men possess a natural sexual drive that is inherently compelling and aggressive in its quest for fulfillment" (p. 58). This discourse privileges male sexual desire to the detriment both of women's sexual fulfillment and their safety. Clearly, by suppressing a discourse of female sexual desire at the behest of social constructions of gender, females stand a diminished chance of experiencing their own sexual pleasure as normative and, indeed, natural.

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[17] As Tolman (2002a) points out, this disparity is most prominent in heterosexual sexual encounters.

One final reality notable to adolescent females' sexual desire is their experienced ambivalence regarding its expression. In a social context that historically has declared female sexual desire dangerous (Phillips, 2000; Tolman, 2002a), females have grown to struggle with both the danger and pleasure of their own sexuality. In her close examination of the narrative accounts of young females' experiences of sexuality and sexual expression, Phillips (2000) notes that, although there exists an emerging female discourse of desire, there exists no corresponding discourse of male accountability regarding actual sexual expression (pp. 76-78). In the gendered reality of female sexuality, the expression of desire is precariously perched on the construct of male sexual privilege: females know that the expression of their desire is concomitant with risk and danger.

Such risk and danger is made manifest in the ambivalence around wanting and not wanting sex, and consent and coercion to sex. Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) explore the ambivalence that accompanies heterosexual interaction and the motives for both wanting and not wanting sex. They found a profound complexity of young people's feelings regarding sexual interaction: arousal, attraction, guilt, fear, harm to image, enhancement of image, and fear of pregnancy, to name a few (p. 17). They further found that sex could be unwanted and consensual, or wanted but not consensual; the olio of feelings experienced and reported regarding sexual desire indicate that a discourse of desire cannot be removed from a discourse of victimization. Tolman and Szalacha's (1999) study, which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods, also found that, for adolescent girls, ambiguity coloured their accounts of sexual desire and expression. In particular, they found that sexual violation predicted for more dis-embodied accounts of sexual activity and notably lower accounts of ensuing sexual pleasure.

For girls with same-sex desires, however, the ambiguity is rather different. As both Thompson (1995) and Tolman (2002a) found in their studies of girls' narrative accounts of sexual experiences, the pleasure and danger of sexual desire directly conflict the hetero-normative social reality in which they are experienced. Unlike girls' accounts of heterosexual encounters, lesbian experiences focused more on the pleasure of the encounters themselves (as sexually satisfying, orgasmic, and mutual) and the danger of the social context (as non-normative and cause for alarm). For instance, Thompson (1995) notes: "Orgasms – as rare as hen's teeth in the heterosexual narratives – were reported in every lesbian account. Only girls who had been with men initially saw orgasm as a feat" (p. 184). For the lesbian girls in her study, the expectation for sexual activity was ultimately pleasure.

The danger that lesbian girls experience in their sexual encounters is more commonly associated with social expectations of heterosexuality. Tolman (2002a) states:

> While it might seem as if girls who feel desire for girls or both girls and boys are somehow exempt from the institution of heterosexuality,

> in fact they stand in a very different and threatening relationship to it, by violating its most core principle: that we are, by nature, attracted to the opposite gender only. Like other women who do not enter into the socially sanctioned heterosexual relationship – women who are single, divorced, or widowed, or nuns – these girls have an "uncontained" sexuality that heightens social anxiety and thus instigates violent reactions … While true in some sense for all adolescent girls, girls who desire girls instigate intense alarm. They commit a double violation: they feel sexual desire, and it is for girls. (pp. 184-185)[18]

Unlike heterosexually desiring girls, the danger lesbian girls experience is rarely from within the intimacy of the relationship. The danger is rather from external social norms and their need, in expressing their desires, to contravene heteronormativity. Thus, for adolescent girls, regardless of the objects of their desires, there exists a profound tension between what they wish to experience and what they actually do experience. The pleasure and danger of sexual desire seem bound up in our social understanding of adolescent female sexuality.

Adolescent girls' experiences of sexual desire plot a course of both danger and pleasure - profound ambivalence. As Phillips (2000) points out, any reduction of sexual desire to either pleasure or danger is a misrepresentation of females' own experiences, and potentially more confounding to them. Their struggles with "the constructed concepts of adulthood, agency, danger, and desire" exist fully immersed in a society that is itself wary of female sexuality (p. 83). Phillips points out that coupled with social ambivalence of female sexuality in general, adolescent girls are also in the midst of the developmental realities of adolescence. Remembering the interactive components of adolescent development (i.e., biological, neurological, social), adolescents experience burgeoning sexuality in concert with their holistic movement towards adulthood. And because that development is ongoing, they are both drawing from their own experiences to grow as individuals, and attending to the social realities that would have them flourish and be relationally capable. The confounding factors of growth spurts, neural inefficiencies, relational challenges, and transitional status as not-still-children but not-yet-adults combine with sexual desire to create a whirlwind of adolescent ambiguity; danger and pleasure become intimately intertwined.

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[18] The appeal to "nature" in heterosexual desire is analogous to a natural law formulation that is static, rather than dynamic, in its methodology. That is, it is unable to account for new information about the human sexual reality, which might indicate that our long-standing interpretations of human sexuality have been lacking. This formulation and application of "the natural" seems apparent in the official Roman Catholic teaching on sexual orientation that deems homosexual tendencies (i.e., orientation) as objectively disordered (but not morally evil) and homosexual acts as intrinsically disordered (and morally evil) (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986).

Phillips' (2000) study presents the voices of young, socio-politically astute, feminist women as they articulate their experiences of female sexual desire. Most striking about their accounts is their constant negotiation between seemingly dichotomous experiences, which in fact are conflated realities of their sexual desires. As Phillips understands them, these negotiations represent strategies of both recognizing and acting on their own sexual desires, and actuating safety in potentially dangerous circumstances. Thus, females maintain hetero-normative male sexual privilege (and are mindful of the social ambiguity of their part in that), while attending to their own desires. She recounts narratives wherein females manipulate their experiences of danger as a means of "damage control" when circumstances are beyond their control. It is fitting here to relate some of those narratives: "stroking egos,"[19] "mastering the male body,"[20] "trying to like it,"[21] or "hoping he'll notice"[22] (Phillips, 2000, pp. 136-148). In each of these circumstances, the females' own sexual desires are deferred to accommodate the males' sexual experience. Phillips also notes that females are loathe to identify their own experiences as battering, abuse, rape, or assault, even though they are quick to recognize other females' same experiences as such. Not wanting to

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[19] "I guess it's a hassle always stroking their egos, like you know, "Oh, you're so great," and "Oh, I really love what you're doing," you know, even when you don't. But believe me, it's more of a hassle

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not to. Because then you have to feel guilty and everything. Because then it's like you have to take care of the fact that he might feel bad, or inadequate, or something. And it's just easier to keep them feeling good about themselves. I think maybe the main thing is that I don't want him to see me as a cold bitch. And if I don't act like, "Oh, this is really good for me," then I think men see you as a domineering bitch. So I guess it's like, men get their needs met directly, but women need to get needs met indirectly. I guess it sort of sucks, but it's better than taking the chance of pissing them off. If you piss them off, even if you're the one who's getting hurt, you could be in even more trouble. So he could take it out on you that you're implying he's a bad lover, and then he could make the pain you were feeling during sex seem like nothing. Some guys just really go ballistic when their male sexual egos are bruised. I just can't be about taking that chance. (Cynthia, 22, "bisexual," "white")" (Phillips, 2000, p. 139).

[20] "I made it my business at an early age, around thirteen I guess, to learn how to give the perfect blow job. I can also give the perfect hand job, so that I can get men off to just get it over with. That way, I'm totally in control. Because once they come, then you're off the hook. Or at least it buys you some time to get out of the situation gracefully. Hopefully, if you play your cards right, they'll just fall asleep. Men are such suckers. They're so easy to manipulate. The only things is, sometimes they get pissed off if you make them come too early, like it's your fault, their lack of control. Then you just say, "No, I love it when you come. It's so exciting to me." Barf! (Robin, 21, "heterosexual"; asked to describe her race(s), she wrote, "I cannot")" (Phillips, 2000, p. 141).

[21] Recounting her first sexual intercourse, Robin noted that it was "violent and unwanted". Knowing that she could not physically control the situation, she attempted instead to "get attracted to him" or "get turned on", but could not. When asked why she attempted to make herself attracted to him, she replied: "I was thinking that if I can get turned on, then this will be consensual, like, a good experience. It was like I was trying to manipulate my own mind or something, so that this wouldn't seem as bad as it really was. I mean, especially for my first experience, I wanted it to be something I wanted, not something that was forced on me. So I tried really hard to make it into something that I wanted, but I couldn't. I just really couldn't" (Phillips, 2000, p. 143).

[22] "Sometimes it just goes on way too long. Guys have this thing that, like, they're real studs if they can last all night. I'm like, 'Come on, already, enough. This is just not fun for me.' But rather than hurt their feelings, I've just pretended that I'm just too tired. That seems to be an acceptable excuse. I mean, sure, he's disappointed, but it's not like I'm telling him he's a boring lover. That would just be too much. I could never just tell him I wanted to stop. So I'll be yawning, not like I'm bored, but like I'm so exhausted that I just have to sleep. If he asks if I want to stop, I'll usually just be like [*yawning*], 'No, that's okay.' But I'll say it in a tone like I really am so tired, and, I hope he'll pick up on the tone in my voice and suggest we stop. Actually, that usually doesn't happen. He'll usually just be like, 'Oh, okay, good,' and keep going. So I'll eventually pretend I just can't keep my eyes open, and that I wish that I could because I'm loving it so much. That way it doesn't really hurt his feelings, and even though I know he's disappointed, it's not like he thinks I'm deliberately cutting him off. That way I don't look frigid or seem too fucked up. (Gloria, 20, "heterosexual," "African-American")" (Phillips, 2000, 146).

self-identify in the role of victim regarding sexual experiences, the women in Phillips' study go to great lengths to resist the naming of abuse, to take some responsibility for males' behaviours, and to construct strategies for coping with the reality of danger and pleasure in the expression of their sexual desires. Phillips further notes, however, that caution is due when attending to the reasons why the women in her study strategize to cope in this manner:

> Rather than attributing young women's decisions to some flaw in their characters, we must appreciate the meanings of these strategies for the women who have constructed them. In order to do this, we must remember to situate our understandings in an analysis of the cultural context and ongoing social and developmental challenges with which they live. As these young women's stories demonstrate, what may appear to be simple self-blame or denial may actually be an effort to take psychological control of their often uncontrollable circumstances. Far from passivity, low self-esteem, or learned helplessness, these women's strategies represent active attempts (however partial and problematic) to preserve a sense of self in an alienating social arena that fails to provide frameworks for being both victim and agent. The primary problem, then, lies not in the minds of these individuals, but in constraining hetero-relational contexts that deny them adequate terms to name their experiences, and adequate avenues to find advocacy when "things go badly". (Phillips, 2000, pp. 188-189)

The stories accounting for female sexual desire are not, however, framed exclusively by danger. The ambiguity of sexual desire also indicates concomitant experiences of pleasure and fulfillment.[23] Tolman's (2002a) investigation into adolescent girls' desires points to a heartening expression of sexual pleasure among some of them. While recognizing the danger of the social context of their desire, still there are girls among those Tolman studied who chose purposefully to act upon and find safety in the expression of their sexual desire. Noting the dilemmas of desire they experienced in negotiating social expectations of female sexuality and their own subjective desire for sexual pleasure, both the lesbian and straight girls in Tolman's study, who were adamant about their expectations of desire and fulfillment, generally expressed a healthy sense of themselves and the parameters for their sexual flourishing (Tolman, 2002a, pp. 118-165). In particular, the few girls in the study who have refused to succumb to a hetero-normative construction of male sexual privilege

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[23] For example, see above accounts from both Thompson (1995) and Tolman (2002a) of lesbian experiences of pleasure and desire.

> have figured out that they have the power to refuse to care, and have chosen not to care, *because* they understand and reject the inequity of a system that gives desire and entitlement to boys and keeps it from girls. They make what is a risky choice to stand apart from the institution of heterosexuality. They use their knowledge and affirmation of their own bodies to defy categories that are meant to keep them out of relationship with themselves and with other girls. They will not enact this form of social control by regulating themselves or policing other girls. (Tolman, 2002a, pp. 164-165)

These girls are aware of their bodies and incredulous that sexual pleasure would not be an expectation for all females within sexual interaction.[24] In voicing their personal commitment to equity of both desire and fulfillment in sexual encounters (most pointedly, with males), these females are cognizant of the social barriers to their sexual agency and capable of defining their own parameters of pleasure.

Most compelling for Tolman in the results of her study was the reality that most of the girls had little or no capacity to locate their own dilemmas of desire within the broader social construction of sexual relationships. This dearth of capacity seemed mired in the lack of safe and meaningful conversations about their embodied sexualities with one another, and/or with mature adult women.[25] The unshared wisdom of preceding generations of female sexual desire leaves an efficacy-gap in our attempts at sexual education. On so many levels the norms set out for moral behaviour of adolescent girls have been inattentive to their very real, embodied experiences of an ambivalent, thick, sexual desire. And, while it seems likely that these girls are not the first to have experienced ambivalence about their burgeoning adolescent sexualities, we have chosen in Western culture to persist in the deafening silence of meaningful engagement.

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[24] Amber, for example: "I'm always the one to say like, 'Jimmy, I want you'… I think maybe other girls aren't really as forward with talking about sex, I mean I've seen a lot of that in girls, my sister is one, she says, 'oh wow, I really wanted to do something, he won't do anything, he doesn't kiss that good.' I said, 'well, Lizzy, why don't you pull him aside and say, you know, if it were me and somebody didn't kiss well, I'd be well, do this, do that, or I'd give them hinters and 'cause I mean I just wouldn't sit there and wait for him to pick up on it, he doesn't know what he's doing, you know, maybe he's not aware" (Tolman, 2002a, p. 160).

Here we encounter again the need for a positive framing of adolescent female sexuality. Tolman (2006) addresses this issue in the context of a hetero-normative social environment that has silenced discussion of female sexuality in general and adolescent female sexuality in particular. She points out that the existing lacuna of dialogue among females of all ages has limited our capacity to teach, mentor, and accompany adolescent females in their sexual development. Thus, openness to the realities of adolescent sexuality, as a matter of course, has the potential to create a positively focused understanding of adolescent female (and male) sexual development.

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[25] Russell corroborates this observation in the light of the sexual development of both adolescent females *and* males in the United States: "With very few exceptions, contemporary young people in the United States do not have access to spaces where the critical discussion of sexuality among other young people and with caring adults is encouraged. Today's youth will benefit from opportunities to examine sexuality in the world around them in order to best understand their own sexuality development. They will also need resources and policies that enable such spaces and caring adults to work with them to create them" (2005, p. 10).

> If one considers the end point of adolescent sexuality development to include the incorporation of the pleasures of sexuality – physical, emotional, relational – along with awareness of the vulnerabilities of sexuality into one's sexual self-concept – then we include pleasure, passion, mutuality, safety, embodiment, agency, experiencing emotions, and vulnerability as developmentally expected for both girls and boys, expanding in tandem (perhaps with deepening intimacy) through adolescence. (Tolman, 2006, p. 86)

Researchers, scholars, and educators advocating on behalf of adolescent females in the safe and pleasurable development of their sexualities are currently bridging the ambiguous precipice of female sexuality. The integrated consideration of what factors contribute to positive adolescent female sexual development stands to benefit adolescent girls in both their sexual desires and sexual experiences. By addressing the dynamic interaction and evolution of physiological (including neurological), psychological, and social factors contributing to sexual development (e.g., the account of "thick" sexual desire proposed by Michelle Fine), I am positioned to provide a theological account of sexual flourishing among adolescent girls. Recognizing the exigence of framing female sexuality positively, such a theological account must be rooted in an account of female sexual pleasure. To assume a preferential option for female sexuality and sexual pleasure in Christian sexual theology is to disrupt the historical silence of the female bodies of evidence in the Church.

Oh. My. God. Towards a Theological Sexual Ethic for Adolescent Girls

An Acceptable Level of Ecstasy: Female Sexual Pleasure

Insofar as developmental psychology has historically focused on the negative outcomes of adolescent female sexual development and expression, so too has sexual theology. Recalling the dualistic accounts of human anthropology that coloured the evolution of the Christian tradition (see Chapter 2), it is not surprising that positive accounts of female sexuality, or even any accounts of female sexuality, did not make their way into sexual theologies until the 20th century. When women began as a matter of course to enter the Academy and the discipline of Theology around the time of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, they consistently observed that sexual theology historically bore the biases of patriarchy and misogyny (Andolsen, 1996). Feminist theologians began to counter an almost 2,000 year dearth of women's experience in Christian theology with a systematic preferential option for the stories of women. In so doing, feminist theologians recovered accounts of women in the Bible (e.g., Schussler Fiorenza, 1983; Trible, 1978) and in the Judeo-Christian theological tradition (e.g., Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Clark, 1983; Johnson, 1994; Ruether, 1983). These recovered accounts, examined with a hermeneutic of suspicion, led to the realization that, like Fine's (1988) missing discourse of desire in sexuality education, there was a missing discourse of sexual pleasure and fulfillment for/of women in theological discourse. Feminist theologians instead uncovered a long history of the vilification of female sexuality and general ignorance about female sexual experience (Andolsen, 1996; Jung, 2000).

Feminist attempts to fill the lacuna have been painstakingly slow in emerging. Encountering by turns hostile and benevolent sexisms (see Note 2 above) within the Christian Churches, feminist theologians have been quietly addressing the methodology, procedure, and content of Christian sexual ethics with a preferential option for women's sexual experiences (e.g., Blodgett, 2002; Cahill, 1996 & 1985; Farley, 2006; Gudorf, 1994; and Heyward, 1989). These emerging theologies provide a glimpse into what could contribute to the content of an adequate ethic of adolescent female sexuality. In particular, they highlight a lack of exploration of the goodness of sexual pleasure within traditional, historical sexual theologies. This lack obtains most profoundly to female realities, simply by dint of the exclusion of female experiences in the development of sexual theology.

Speaking to the general Christian theological tradition, William Stayton points out the various Western cultural barriers to the "development of a creative theology for sexual pleasure" (1996, p. 342): 1) the "sexual traumatization" of Western [perhaps North American?] culture by the contrasting exploitative and commercial social presentation of sexuality and the "anti-sex" Church presentation of sexuality; 2) the valuation of sexual ignorance (e.g., abstinence-only sexual education); 3) the secrecy of sexual desire and pleasure (e.g., their relegation to the realm of mystery); and 4) the devaluation of sexual pleasure by the Church (pp. 342-344). Stayton's response to these barriers is to return to a biblical value structure that is focused on the integral nature of human persons in relationships. Rather than limiting sexual pleasure to the procreative and, at times, projecting anti-sex attitudes in response to the commercialization of sexuality, he suggests that theology ought to locate sexual pleasure within the context of the human capacity to reflect divine love in relationship.

> Our capacity for love, for relationship, and our ability to respond to intimate relationships with such deep and meaningful sexual pleasure is a humbling experience. To restrict sexual pleasuring to the procreational function, and to validate sexual pleasure only when it occurs in heterosexual relationships, diminishes the creative capacities God gave humans for expressing love… the mind of God can be discerned whenever humans seek wholeness, that is, to integrate mind, body and spirit…. When integration of love, sexuality and spirituality are experienced, God's intention is born anew in the world. Sexual pleasuring does not hinder either spiritual growth or service to humanity. (Stayton, 1996, p. 345)

In an effort to deconstruct the barriers to a Christian sexual theology that is attentive to, and welcoming and nurturing of, sexual pleasure, Stayton proposes renewed attention to the gift of relationship to self, others, and God that may be nourished in pleasurable sexual experience. This proposal fosters the privileging of female sexual experience in a feminist sexual theology, for it opens the door to sexual experiences of pleasure that have traditionally been absent from the development of theology.

The Roman Catholic Tradition has historically found redemption for sexual activity only in its link to procreation; it continues currently to link procreation and unity inextricably in sexual expression. This means that each act of marital sexual intercourse must be both physically open to the possibility of procreation (i.e., no artificial contraception) and physically unitive of the couple (i.e., no reproductive technologies) (Paul VI, 1968).[26] The theology supporting this teaching and its subsequent development was formulated within the patriarchal and hierarchal structures of the Church that excluded (and continues to exclude) women and women's sexual experiences (Andolsen, 1996; Gudorf, 1994; Jung, 2000). These teachings ostensibly reflect a male-oriented coital experience linking orgasm (pleasure/unity) to ejaculation (procreation). Because female sexual pleasure (regardless of whether or not orgasm is achieved) is by no means linked to male ejaculation or, for that matter, to penile-vaginal intercourse, females' experiences of sexual pleasure are absent from the ethical construction of morally acceptable intercourse.

Although in typical situations the procreative aspect of sexual intercourse will always be available to females, it is uncertain that pleasure will. The unitive aspect of sexual intercourse for women is thus minimized to her physical participation, devoid of any concomitant manifestations of unity (e.g., intimacy, mutuality, trust, pleasure) (Jung, 2000, p. 28). Ironically, while procreativity (which is located in the female capacity for pregnancy, i.e., pubertal onset and menstruation) has been so privileged in the history of Christian sexual theology, women's menstruating and reproducing sexual bodies and any pleasure deriving therefrom have been considered, when considered at all, suspicious (Andolsen, 1996).[27]

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[26] Heterosexual marriage remains the only morally acceptable context for sexual intercourse and is assumed in any official Roman Catholic discussion of sexual morality.

[27] This attitude towards menstruation is reflected in a Western social construction of the adolescent experience of menarche and menstruation (see Chapter 3). In both the Church and the broader social spheres, menstruation is best kept a hidden "hygienic crisis".

Contemporary feminist theologians are thus recreating sexual theology mindful of the complexity of female sexuality and the ambiguity of female sexual experiences. Christine Gudorf (1994), Patricia Beattie Jung (2000), and Mary Pellauer (1994), for instance, go to great lengths to explicate the moral significance of female orgasm. For these theologians, the corrective for a lack of female experience in theological accounts of human sexuality lies not only in its identification, but also in more adequate accounts of female sexual experiences. Female pleasure and orgasm in sexual theology will only be adequately represented with females' own accounts of pleasure (physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual) and orgasm. For Pellauer (1994), naming some elements of her own experience of orgasm (i.e., Being Here-and-Now, Varieties of Sensations, Ecstasy, Vulnerability, Power, and Nothing Above Can Be Taken For Granted) suggests ways in which theologians can begin to consider what female sexual pleasure means within a foundational or experiential theological sexual ethic (pp. 154-158). Both Gudorf (1994) and Jung (2000) are willing to go one step further: they propose that mutual sexual pleasure ought to be considered normative in theological sexual ethics. And while they do not name pleasure as the only norm of ethical sexual expression, certainly its introduction is a new element in Christian theological thought. Indeed, their proposals stem from their shared conviction in the goodness of the female sexual body regardless of its participation in procreation.

Towards the goal of explicitly incorporating female sexual pleasure into the content of sexual theology, each of these theologians counters the official Roman Catholic opposition to masturbation with their advocacy of its promotion of sexual pleasure and delight for females. If, as Andolsen (1996) suggests, we shift our sexual ethics away from an emphasis on reproduction as the primary good pertaining to sexual expression, towards its inclusion in a number of goods (e.g., pleasure, comfort, intimacy, or solace), then there is room to reflect the reality that sexual pleasure (self-pleasure or pleasure with a partner) comes from self-knowledge. Gudorf (1994) also notes that female sexual self-knowledge accompanying masturbation and exploration of one's own sexual response patterns enhances both personal flourishing and relational intimacy (pp. 91-95) (see also Jung, 2000).

Because sexual self-knowledge lends to sexual pleasure (both personally and relationally), masturbation is intimately linked to female sexual flourishing. Thus, a moral norm against masturbation detracts decidedly from the female capacity for sexual pleasure. It follows, therefore, that women who do not experience sexual pleasure from coitus are left with no space to explore their own sexual pleasures and no reason to believe that this is anything but their own problems. As Jung (2000) points out, in the historical theological construction of heterosexual intercourse, female pleasure (or lack thereof) is merely "an accident" of the action. It is not necessary for the function of male orgasm and ejaculation, and for the ensuing procreative possibilities. Pellauer (1994) notes that, theologically speaking, sexual pleasure is gendered.

> It is peculiar that so few ethical discussions of sexuality take up female orgasm, let alone its problematic character or its importance to flourishing. Much more emphasis and lingering philosophical care has been spent on desire. This may be one of the distinguishing marks of patriarchy in sexual ethics: Men are able to take pleasure for granted in sex. Or perhaps they translate pleasure into desire… The progress

> from desire to pleasure to ecstasy is precisely what women cannot take for granted in our society… We do not have a language fully empowered and inflected with women's sexual experiences. (p. 161)

One hallmark of feminist sexual theology is that it strives towards the flourishing of women in their sexual complexities. Indeed, Pellauer (1994) understands female orgasm to play an important role in female flourishing. Andolsen (1996), Stayton (1996), Jung (2000), and Farley (2006) all understand human sexual pleasure and mutual delight to be integral to human well-being and relationship with the Divine. The gift of human sexuality is the expression of intimate relationship in which we have the capacity to experience the ecstasy of covenant with God via mutual interpersonal vulnerability. To move towards God is to encounter in human experience the possibility of flourishing in relational sexual grace. That the Christian theological tradition has historically overlooked this capacity for sexual flourishing in favour of a procreative ethic and devaluation of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is to the detriment of all humanity.

By extension, the traditional inattention to females' real experiences of sexuality has also left the Christian community parched for a meaningful sexual theology for adolescent girls. Recognizing the complex negotiation of sexuality facing adolescent girls (e.g., biological and neural development, menarche and menstruation, gender identity construction, socialization, objectification, sexualization, danger and pleasure, personal health, safety), I suggest that theologians (particularly feminists) can provide a more helpful sexual theology than we have historically. I also suggest that more general comfort with meaningful conversation about sexuality and its context would facilitate, certainly among women in the Church, a more authoritative mentorship role in their development. In this light, I now turn to the substantive construction of a theological sexual ethic that is attentive to adolescent females' sexual realities in North American culture and useful for their healthy and meaningful sexual development.

Smells Like Teen Spirit: Adolescent Female Flourishing

The call for a positive framing of adolescent female sexuality in developmental psychological discourses is echoed in feminist theological accounts of female sexuality in general. I propose that a meaningful dialogue between these two schools of thought can be based on the notion of human flourishing. The *Canadian Oxford English Dictionary* (Barber, 2004) states that to flourish is "to thrive or blossom"; "to grow vigorously and luxuriantly"; and "to attain full development". Not overly to romanticize the human experience, I must note that human flourishing is a complicated enterprise. Most notably, it requires attention to both the concrete particular circumstances of this one individual, the broader context in which he or she lives, and the complex interaction of each one with the other. While in theory we can propose, speculate, and imagine what such flourishing might entail, in practice it is a messy business.

People's real, concrete lives do not submit easily to the neatness of theory. Thus the interaction of theory and practice must proceed lightly and with humility to allow for error in the elusive attainment of human goods. This admission of complexity is especially true when dealing with human sexuality. If the theological community is committed to formulating a just and loving ethic of sexuality for adolescent girls, we must be tolerant of ambiguity and the flux of the human spirit. When opening the door to human flourishing as a starting place for discourse on ethics, sexuality, and the developing person, I believe it necessary to opt for a thick formulation of what that might be.

Is There Something I Should Know? The Thickness of Flourishing

The recognition of flourishing as the crucible for an adequate sexual theology for adolescent girls, and of its profound thickness, is bolstered in both the areas of feminist theology and adolescent sexual development. Cristina Traina, my primary dialogue partner in the construction of a feminist natural law framework for sexual ethics, proposes that flourishing is the primary criterion for morality. More specifically, to meet this flourishing, we must predicate our understanding of the human agent on a thick, vague anthropology that assumes its *telos* in the embrace of God. Traina is not content merely to "add women and stir" to the historical formulations of natural law in order to incorporate women's lives and experiences into contemporary theology. Rather, as noted in Chapter Two, she advocates for a radical, to the roots, reconsideration of the method, procedure, and content of the Roman Catholic foundations for ethics.

The thick, vague anthropology necessary for such a radical reformulation is one that admits of ambiguity and ambivalence in human relationships and understanding.

More pointedly, the flourishing of women will rely on such a reformulation. Only in such a reformulation will we depart from theoretical notions of "equality" or "freedom" and move into the complexities of women's actual lives: the "prerequisites" for truly free choices. Not surprisingly, Traina challenges the assumption that these prerequisites are already in place for females by listing their practical manifestations: "healthy bodies, healthy relationships, and a degree of economic and political security. Sexual and reproductive self-possession, as well as a social position secure enough to enable women truly to choose intercourse, childbirth, or parenting, are thus among the prerequisites for women's flourishing" (Traina, 1999, p. 147). The thickness of human flourishing is thus complicated for women by persistent barriers to its basic prerequisites. This thickness, however, is precisely the point of fruition for female human flourishing, for without its identification simplistic formulations of the human experience will prevail over females' well-being.

The call to recognize the thickness of human flourishing is echoed by Michelle Fine and Sara McLelland in their 2006 revisitation of Fine's (1988) "missing discourse of desire". Here Fine acknowledges how adolescent female sexual desire is inherently shaped by the socio-political context in which it is experienced. Hetero-normativity, male sexual privilege, and the anathema of adolescent female sexual desire all contribute to the tension of pleasure and danger that comes with experiencing and acting upon desire. If recognizing the thick complexity of females' flourishing (sexual and otherwise) will facilitate a positive social construction of sexuality, so too will it for adolescent female sexual flourishing. Given that their sexual desire is so profoundly shaped by their social realities, to flourish sexually requires not just attention to sexual desire itself, but to the ways in which sexual desire is monitored, regulated, and disparaged in both theological and social contexts. Recognition of the complexities of this context will require attention not just to the negative outcomes of adolescent female sexual expression (e.g., unplanned pregnancy, STIs, violence) but also to social privileging of male sexual pleasure, ignorance of female sexual pleasure, adolescent developmental realities, and assumptions of heterosexuality. To thrive, to develop fully, and to flourish sexually is, both theologically and developmentally, a complex and intriguing enterprise: it is thick.

Fine and McClelland also recognize that adolescent females experience the desire to engage sexually parallel to a host of desires for other engagement: intellectual, political, economic, and social. Such thick desires require publicly recognized and funded "enabling conditions" (not unlike Traina's prerequisites for flourishing). These conditions include:

> [O]pportunities to: (a) develop intellectually, emotionally, economically, and culturally; (b) imagine themselves as sexual beings capable of pleasure and cautious about danger without carrying the undue burden of social, medical, and reproductive consequences; (c) have access to information and health-care resources; (d) be protected from structural and intimate violence and abuse; and (e) rely on a public safety net of resources to support youth, families, and community.
>
> A framework of thick desire situates sexual well-being within structural contexts that enable economic, educational, social, and psychological health. (Fine & McClelland, 2006, pp. 300-301)

For Fine and McClelland, the thickness of adolescent female desire is layered with the prerequisites for whole human flourishing. With the framework of thickness of human flourishing in hand, I turn to the interaction of adolescent female sexualities with a feminist natural law.

Calling All Angels: Sexual Theology and Adolescent Girls

Ambiguity: A Hazy Shade of God

The Christian theological enterprise is characterized by the profound tension between what is already now (the immanence of the Reign of God, made manifest in the person Jesus Christ) and what is not yet (the fullness of the Reign of God, to be known in beatitude). This tension characterizes not only the discipline of theology but also the reality of human experience: we are not finished until we find rest in the heart of the Divine. The unfolding of knowledge of human sexual goods in the long history of human sexual experience is the growth of the human capacity to see and recognize the patterns of God's grace in the gift of sexuality. If our *telos,* our ultimate goal, is union with God, then it would seem at both the individual and the social levels we are simultaneously already now there and not yet arrived. The growth in understanding of human sexuality within the human community continues more adequately to reveal the subtleties of intimacy, power, pleasure, refuge, vulnerability, delight, and fruitfulness concomitant with sexual experience.

If our goal is beatitude, then our vehicle is human embodiment. Our perpetual striving towards the Divine takes place only in the reality of our bodies. And although we would like our experiences of both our bodies and the Divine always to be pleasurable, in reality, they are not. Our sexual experiences, in particular, seem consistently to waver between the already now ecstasy of union with God and the not yet perfection of union with another. Sexual intimacy is prone to be muddled with messiness; bodily incapacity, emotional uncertainty, relational distance, confused intentions, or even cruel abuses indicate clearly that whatever sexual relationships could be, they are not always so. As we move through our lives growing ever in wisdom and capacity to discern God's presence in the midst of such a muddle, we are vulnerable to the ambiguity both of sexual experience and intimacy with God. Yet only through the ambiguous experience of real human interaction with self, others, and creation is God's grace apparent. When human love, compassion, sorrow, or joy is reflected in the face of another, we meet God. When we experience our own bodily delight, we meet God. When a quiet breeze wisps our hair across our face, we meet God. This is not, however, the whole of the human story. We do not live only in the positive and gentle realm of bodily experience. Too frequently we experience the violence of another's hatred in the painful slap of anger, the embarrassment of bodily decay or disease, or destruction by nature in a punishing environment. Embodied human experience is already now in the embrace of God, but not yet fully so.

The theological ambiguity of the Christian experience is most profoundly expressed in human sexuality. If we are already there now, we most certainly have not yet fully arrived. The complexity of human sexuality is known in the ambiguity of our experiences and the ambiguity of its bodily manifestations. For instance, its positive manifestation of trust and intimacy witnesses to the inherent goodness of sexuality and the contextual goodness of sexual expression. Yet its negative manifestation in abuse of power and violence also witnesses to the ways in which sexuality and sexual expression can be used as means of oppression and diminishment. Neither is human sexuality definitively expressed in each body: to whom we are attracted, our understanding of ourselves as sexed and gendered in this particular body, the interaction of these with one another, and the way in which we interpret these phenomena are by no means uniform. We can be uncertain, confused, or ambivalent; we can bump against social norms; we can experience first hand that human sexuality can be ambiguous. Thus, the tension between pleasure and danger in human sexual desire and the complexity of human sexual flourishing attest, in theological terms, to the Christian understanding of the slow, painstaking, yet ultimately hopeful revelation of God. Sexual expression can facilitate and deter human flourishing; the moral task at hand is to discern, among the expressions, which will do which.

Natural law formulations within the Roman Catholic theological tradition have, in various ways, attempted to clarify the morality of sexual expression. As noted in Chapter Two, they have done so with variable success. Here it is helpful, I believe, to return to the foundation of natural law for insight into the ambiguity of moral reasoning. In his formulation of natural law, Thomas Aquinas shows a degree of tolerance for ambiguity that has not always been mirrored in successive formulations. First, he iterates little content for the natural law, speaking more vaguely to the process of moral reasoning than to the substance of moral acts. Second, he recognizes that human persons have varying capacities for practical wisdom and prudence. We might not yet (or ever) develop the ability to reason well about what we ought to do; and we might not yet (or ever) develop the responsibility to act upon what we know we ought to do. We can be obtuse, biased, willfully ignorant, or immature, and any of these factors might impede our moral reasoning and action. Finally, Aquinas recognizes that situations and details will obscure or colour our moral reasoning, so that although we can speculate on universal moral truths, in reality, the more detailed the particulars, the more difficult it is to discern those truths. Ethics and morality are messy and difficult.

The wisdom in Aquinas' vague account of the natural law is that he is attentive to both the universal and the particular in his method. He recognizes that, although in typical situations human persons all have a capacity for practical moral reasoning, we would be foolish to expect the degree of capacity to be uniform for all human persons regardless of circumstance. He also recognizes that what ought to be done in any particular circumstance is by no means a *de facto* conclusion. To reason and act well in practical moral situations takes time, experience, practice, attention, understanding, good judgement, and responsibility. This is an ambiguous undertaking. Human understanding and wisdom are multi-faceted: they ebb and flow with continual movement – now forward, now back. We reach our destination, but if we are wise we realize that the destination is not the goal. We might already be there, but we are still not yet.

In traditional theological terms, this ambiguity is summed up in the tension between virtue and sin. Because our *telos* is towards God, virtue and virtuous actions are necessarily those that are directed towards relationship with God. Virtue is found in fullness of relationship with the Divine. We can be wise, loving, just, and free only insofar as we ideally direct our lives towards communion with God. But we also have the capacity to sin. Virtue does not manifest itself fully at birth; rather, it requires development of character and skill in human moral reasoning and action. In so developing, we are humbled by our own inadequacies and growth in wisdom and integrity. We negotiate our freedom to act with our ultimate freedom in relationship with the Divine. We attend to our own sinfulness in the hope of growing in virtue and love. We can be already virtuous, but not yet fully so.[28]

Such ambiguity in sexual moral decision-making is quite profoundly felt in the burgeoning self that is the adolescent. This time of transition between childhood and adulthood signals the onset of the between times: the already now sexual and the not yet sexually mature. In coming into their sexual adulthood, adolescents are already sexually maturing. They are developing the capacities that will facilitate their moral decision-making: physiological, neural, hormonal, spiritual, social, cognitive, and affective developments are colliding in the magical melee of teen spirit. Depending on age, circumstance, and personal characteristics, adolescents will be variously thoughtful and stupid, adventurous and lazy, happy and sad, energetic and tired, polite and rude, chatty and brooding. They will also, however, run the continuum of realities in between each extreme. In short, they will surprise and delight, and disappoint and anger us. If looking in from the outside at adolescent realities is confusing and ambiguous, so too it must be from within. They are already now not children: they are chronologically, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially on the journey to adulthood. Still, they are not yet adults: they have not fully mastered their capacities to reflect, to judge, to act, to love; they have not fully mastered the ability to curb their impulses for some greater good; they are not yet wise to the ambiguity of human sexuality.

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[28] Margaret Farley touches on the tension between sin and virtue. She notes the long and arduous process of human development into the ability to be prudent, wise, temperate, courageous, and loving in our sexual lives: to be virtuous (Farley, 2006, pp. 240-244).

This ambiguity lies squarely in adolescents' negotiation of this transition time into adulthood. They must engage the complexity of what is already within their capacity in order to develop towards what is not yet firmly in place. For adolescents to mature and develop sexually, they must try, practice, and experience their sexual bodies. They must learn the skills of attention to desire, care of another, self and mutual pleasure, and responsible sexual expression. Only with such experience will they edge ever closer to full flourishing in both their sexualities and their lives.

Moral theological discourses, and indeed moral theologians, have struggled with this tension in the history and development of moral theology. We have at times vilified or glorified the human sexual body; from these various expressions emanates the wisdom of ambiguity. Aquinas' attention to the tensions present in practical moral reasoning and prudence provides a cornerstone for a sexual theological ethic accounting for adolescent girls. We in the Western world have reached a crossroads in our understanding of adolescent female sexuality in this particular context. We are struggling to attend to both the individual particular realities of each female, and the broader universal patterns for females in general. We have found our historical formulations of sexual ethics lacking in their usefulness to adolescent girls, precisely because those same girls are excluded methodologically, procedurally, and substantively from our discourses. Clearly, rules will not suffice. Unyielding norms for sexual behaviour that are inattentive to the realities of adolescence, and females, are not only irrelevant,-they are harmful.

Given the thickness of female adolescent sexual desire and flourishing and the historical exclusion of that reality in the formulation of sexual theologies, feminist theoretical discourse is a helpful corrective to the oppressive theologies imbued with patriarchy and misogyny. To address the particular lives of adolescent females in sexual theology, we must first acknowledge and unravel the patriarchal constructs within which theology has developed. Feminist theorists and feminist theologians have, over the past four decades, systematically deconstructed the hetero-normative and at times misogynist characteristics of preceding generations of male-dominated scholarship. What is remarkably helpful in the feminist analysis is the uncovering of bias against females in social patterns that have, over time, detracted from female flourishing. Feminist theories, with leanings towards the particular experiences of women as normative for ethical formulations, have drawn attention to the ways in which assumptions about the universal nature of humankind have diminished women (and others) as somehow less than the paradigmatic male. In so doing, the social structures have systemically excluded from the category of human large groups of non-paradigmatic persons (e.g., women, non-white males, children). In the realm of sexuality, this bias has supported a hetero-normative male sexual privilege that excludes "different" sexualities and expressions from sexual moral constructs. The attention to the particular, a hallmark of feminist theory, has opened the door to accounting for difference in sexual ethical theory and practice.

While attention to the particular has been a necessary development in theoretical and theological discourse, it has led to some consternation with regard to universally recognized rights and ethical standards against which we can declare some actions clearly wrong.[29] As Cristina Traina and many of her contemporaries have noted, feminist discourse must have some critical leverage for identifying and denouncing what is clearly wrong. In this light, Traina's articulation of a feminist natural law takes seriously the moral ambiguity that arises when considering the particular and the universal in females' lives. Drawing from the feminist theoretical deconstruction of the heritage of scholarly patriarchy, Traina proposes that we can indeed identify "revisable universals" - norms that are articulated in humility and tentativeness, as a means of interpreting the ongoing revelation of God in the world. She suggests that the reconstruction of normative theology and ethics, within a feminist natural law formulation, will address the ambiguity inherent in practical moral reasoning. Although willing to admit of normative sexual behaviour, these revisable universals are fluid enough to incorporate the particular lived realities of individual persons. With regard to adolescent female sexuality, a sexual theology constructed within such a framework would provide a tenuous recognition of both the dangers and pleasures inherent in sexual desire. Such a sexual theology would be mindful of the already-now but not-yet realities of both adolescence and Christian faith.

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[29] Likely the most prominent example of moral hand-wringing as regards universal and particular norms, globally speaking, is the practice of female genital cutting (female genital mutilation or female circumcision). The way in which one names the practice of genital cutting among females in some cultures is likely to identify whether one views this as a culturally-sanctioned activity over which external cultures have no moral sway, or as a universally maleficent practice that ought always to be denounced.

What a Girl Needs: Pre-Requisites for Female Adolescent Sexual Flourishing

Prior to outlining theological norms for female adolescent sexual expression, I wish to articulate the pre-requisites for sexual flourishing that will facilitate useful integration of the norms. Without these pre-requisites, it is doubtful that the norms will be relevant. These pre-requisites for sexual flourishing assume the previously mentioned pre-requisites for thick female flourishing articulated by Cristina Traina (1999) and for thick sexual desire articulated by Michelle Fine and Sara McClelland (2006). This assumption situates adolescent girls' sexual flourishing within the broader social, political, economic, educational, religious, and environmental contexts in which they live. There can be, therefore, no promotion of sexual flourishing that is not attentive to the concomitant existential realities of individual persons.

The first pre-requisite for adolescent female sexual flourishing is an open social awareness and acceptance of the functioning of the female sexual body. It will not do to keep menarche and menstruation a covert reality that virtually all females experience but none are known to experience at any given time. The current disconnection of the female reproducing body from the female sexual body diminishes the meaning of menstruation in the lives of girls and women and thus reinforces an individualistic perception of menstruation as private. Although menarche and menstruation are private, they are also public in their social reception and interpretation. Our current Western perceptions of female monthly bleeding, as distinct from female sexual attraction and expression, has led to the bifurcation of individual and social female sexual bodies. This bifurcation leads to the further dissociation of the sexual female body from actual embodied females. We thus witness in Western culture the objectification of female sexual bodies, premature sexualization of girls, and the commodification of female sexual desire.

At a theological level, an acceptance of the female sexual body in its entirety will only be accomplished when theological discourse systematically reconciles the quizzical construction of the sexual female as virgin (non-desiring but procreative) and whore (desiring but non-procreative). Because morally upstanding girls do not talk about their sexuality, much less demonstrate it, their virginal silence of desire meets the patriarchal requirement of silence in discourse about the female sexual body. And because morally bereft girls do speak about their sexuality, and demonstrate it, but are not fit to be mothers, their whorish voices sit outside of the patriarchal discourse of sexuality in general. Their explicitly sexual, menstruating bodies are inappropriate for theological discussion. Within such a construction female bodies are denied the dignity of equal access to the Divine in sacramental life.[30]

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[30] Tina Beattie (2003) provides an extraordinarily astute and integrated critique of the sacred and secular constructions of female sexual bodies: "On the one hand, femininity is a transcendent ideal of perfection – a manufactured and commodified body that bears little resemblance to the living realities of the female flesh. On the other hand, real women have no voice with which to offer a different, more authentic account of women's embodied personhood as a source of dignity, meaning and worth. If the men of God invested the female body with all their sexual anxieties and robbed her of her capacity to image God, the men of Mammon have exploited that culture of denigration by using it to position

The second pre-requisite for sexual flourishing is explicit recognition not only that sexuality is inherently good and sexual expression is good (within a heterosexual marriage, according to official Roman Catholic teaching), but also that sexual pleasure itself is good, that female sexuality itself is good, and also that female sexual pleasure itself is good. In particular, these goods must be recognized even if physically separated from the possibility of procreation. The long-standing Roman Catholic theological tradition that offers tenuous acceptance to females has led to official sexual teachings that exclude female sexual pleasure. The privileging of male sexual pleasure in discourse around moral sexual activity has especially diminished adolescent females' sexual agency in heterosexual relationships. Further, such male privilege virtually denies the possibility of pleasurable sexual experience outside of penile-vaginal penetration. The reality that female sexuality and sexual pleasure is not a modified male sexuality and sexual pleasure must be made explicit if sexual flourishing is to be nurtured in normative sexual expression.

The third pre-requisite for sexual flourishing is the broad recognition that sexual development occurs within a communal context. Much of what complicates our individual self-evolution into and within our sexuality is its interaction with the social context in which we sit. If adolescent girls are to flourish in their sexual development, then there must be a broad consensus of community support for relational development, female sexual well-being and safety, sexual knowledge, and the

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women in a constant state of inadequacy and shame, perpetuated now not by spiritual fantasies of idealized femininity but by consumerist fantasies of the female body as a marketable commodity" (p. 128).

beneficent possibilities of sexual interaction. When all sexual expression among adolescent females is viewed with suspicion, or negatively framed, or silenced, girls learn early that their sexuality is dangerous, that they will be ostracized for non-normative sexual expression, and that silence serves not to protect them sexually, but to isolate them. For any society to be supportive of healthy adolescent female sexual development, it must be indicated by adult comfort with addressing the topic. If parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, or leaders in the community refuse openly to address adolescent sexuality with candor and security, adolescents will follow suit. A pre-requisite, therefore, of adolescent females' sexual flourishing is a social commitment to their healthy development.

The final pre-requisite for adolescent females' sexual flourishing pertains most obviously to the sexed and gendered anthropological constructions persistent in official Roman Catholic teachings. For adolescent girls (and women) to flourish in their sexualities, particularly within the Roman Catholic context, the hierarchical Church must divest itself of anthropological formulations that diminish the fullness of females' humanity. In particular, the anthropological assumption of gender complementarity that riddles contemporary Catholic teachings addressing sexual morality embodies gendered assumptions that conflate sex and gender. In so doing, the teachings promulgate a benevolent sexism that patronizes females and reduces their genius to reproduction and child-rearing.

Insofar as gender complementarity reinforces stereotypical gender roles, the Church continues to diminish female sexual agency with a deferral to feminine receptivity (in contrast to male initiation) and a negation of female sexual desire (in contrast to uncontrollable male sexual desire). Females' participation in the Divine image is predicated on their completion of males, since female bodies do not biologically reflect the body of Christ (See John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis,* 1994). The construction of complementarity advanced within official Roman Catholic anthropological formulations is therefore one that limits the capacities of both females and males based on adoption of historical formulations of sexual dualisms and gender.

If to flourish sexually is to have a sense of one's sexual agency and capacity for control over one's body, then to be slotted into a stereotypically feminine construction of virginal sexual procreativity would be the exact opposite of flourishing. Eradication of the sin of sexism, which is manifest in the oppressive relegation of females to stereotypical gender roles, is long overdue. For adolescent girls to have a sense of the gift from God that is their sexuality, they must be able to voice their perceptions and experiences that depart from the construction of complementarity; they must have the divinity of their real sexual bodies affirmed. This divinity must also be recognized to exist not only in complementary opposite-sex relationships but also in the varied sexualities within females' experiences. Enough empirical evidence exists to confirm that human sexual flourishing occurs outside of hierarchically imposed compulsory heterosexuality. Only when theological, anthropological discourse welcomes sex and gender roles that are more amenable to females' diverse experiences will adolescent girls flourish sexually.

In meeting these pre-requisites for a theological sexual ethic accounting for adolescent girls' realities, we would as a community be indicating our social willingness and support for the creation of an environment of flourishing. In so doing, we would also be indicating our willingness to entertain and instill a sexual ethic that permits of ambiguity and tentativeness. Thus the norms that would embody that ethic would simultaneously be essential and accidental, universal and particular, static and dynamic. This premise is a difficult rock upon which to build an ethic; contemporary moral and ethical discourse would have me chose between the provisional and the fixed. I believe, however, that the feminist natural law formulation's willingness to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity, to negotiate the already-now and not-yet of human sexual understanding and morality, provides the ideal starting point for moral normativity. My articulation of such norms follows.

What's a Girl to Do? A Theological Sexual Ethic Accounting for Adolescent Girls

The construction of sexual theology and ethics in the contemporary post-modern, Western culture is one of the primary tasks of feminist theologians of sexuality. The underlying currents of patriarchy and misogyny that pepper the Roman Catholic sexual theological tradition require systematic defusing in order that theology be made relevant and helpful for adolescent girls. Beyond the deconstruction of the tradition, however, lies its reconstruction in a spirit of love and fidelity to the revelation of God throughout human history. Accompanying women's contribution to contemporary theological discourse are accounts of the wisdom of the female body. These accounts, which voice females' sexualities, sexual desires, and sexual experiences, are revelation of the Divine hope for sexual flourishing. In these voices we hear the incarnate realities that constitute females' sexual lives, and we are called to a normative account of what nurtures their sexual flourishing. This account, the formulation of content for a feminist natural law sexual ethic, is the articulation of a sexual theology appropriate and useful to adolescent girls. Assuming the pre-requisites for sexual flourishing I have outlined above, following are six basic norms or revisable universals that I propose for an adequate sexual ethic.[31]

First is a normative understanding that personal sexual knowledge of one's body is a good. As evidence shows, when adolescent girls (and others) know their own bodies as sexual, pleasing, and fruitful, they are better equipped to make sexual choices that will both protect and facilitate their own well-being. Most explicitly, discouraging masturbation as a means of sexual self-exploration ought itself to be considered sinful. Because such a prohibition places females' (and males') sexual development and ensuing sexual health at risk, a reconsideration of its place in sexual theological thought is in order. If the Christian community is to take adolescent females' sexual flourishing seriously, we must condone the factors that nurture their development. Masturbation is one such factor.

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[31] I am indebted here to Margaret Farley's articulation of norms for an ethic of "just sex" (2006, pp. 216-232). My digression from her articulation has less to do with any inadequacy in her account than with my concern to address adolescent female concerns specifically. As Farley herself notes, it is not clear to her that her account is appropriate for adolescents in general, given their developmental realities (pp. 232-235). Farley's work clearly recognizes the ambiguity of human sexual experience and our attempts to articulate what might nurture human sexual flourishing within a Christian context. The already-now, not-yet experience we embody as Christian persons informs her ethical construction.

Masturbation among females further serves to diminish male sexual privilege in the construction of morally acceptable sexual interaction. Evidence clearly suggests that females who have masturbated and have an intimate understanding of their sexual bodies are more likely to experience sexual pleasure both alone and with a partner. More specifically, females are less likely to reach orgasm by penile-vaginal intercourse than they are by other means of stimulation. Promoting that aspect of sexual pleasure ought to be as normative as the promotion of male orgasm and ejaculation. Thus masturbation as normative recognizes the equal necessity of sexual pleasure in males and females. If the acceptance and promotion of sexual pleasure is pre-requisite for flourishing, then knowing how to attain sexual pleasure will facilitate flourishing.

A second norm for sexual activity that is mindful of adolescent females' sexual experiences is the delay of heterosexual sexual intercourse. Sufficient evidence suggests that the later persons (especially females) debut sexually, the better are their chances for long-term sexual and personal well-being. Because heterosexual intercourse is imbued with the social realities of gender differentiation, objectification of the female body, male sexual privilege, and hetero-normativity, this particular sexual activity is best delayed until there is a commensurate level of maturity to carry its ensuing implications.[32] To deal well with the implications of sexual activity, the partners must first have reached a level of respect both for their own selves, and for the other. Further, they must have a sense of personal pleasure that will inform their sexual experiences. Knowing the long course of neural, hormonal, affective, and social development through adolescence, it seems clear that teens are best able to integrate their sexuality in later adolescence/early adulthood. This second norm is tied intimately to the first norm; evidence indicates that self-knowledge of the sexual body promotes healthy delay of intercourse among adolescents.

A third normative aspect of ethical sexual expression is equity of power[33] *and appropriate vulnerability.* Although typically chronological age will contribute to relational power differential,[34] this is not necessarily the case. The sexual norm calling for equity of power and appropriate vulnerability insists that persons engaging in coupled sexual activity share relational power between them that is just and respectful. Thus, appropriate vulnerability addresses the disparity of power, in any of its manifestations (i.e., physical, emotional, social, financial, etc.), that leads to oppressive or abusive relational inequity. Any sexual expression makes its participants vulnerable. At the level of ethical sexual expression, such vulnerability would be appropriate only insofar as equity of power and personal maturity yield a level of trust that facilitates flourishing and safety. This would clearly rule out of court directly violent or coercive acts such as rape, sexual assault, or sexual abuse.

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[32] This reality has long been recognized by the Christian community in its normative understanding of sexual abstinence outside of marriage. The Roman Catholic Church officially recognizes sacramental marriage (as ordained by God) as the only context strong enough to bear the weight of sexual intimacy, regardless of age or maturity of the persons involved.

[33] Here I differentiate between "equity" and "equality". Because of basic differences that might occur between partners (e.g., disparity of physical strength), equality is not sufficient to describe the notions of mutuality and interdependence that ought to exist within an equitable relationship.

[34] Hence, the so-called "Romeo and Juliet" clauses adopted within some legal jurisdictions, which provide for legal sexual activity among minors who are close in age.

Appropriate vulnerability and equity of power thus exclude sexual activity between any persons whose relationship is clearly structured around the control, manipulation, or abuse of one partner over the other. Also, when a person in a position of power over another (e.g., teacher, supervisor, employer) initiates a sexual (or otherwise intimate) relationship with that person (e.g., student, subordinate, employee), this cannot be ethically acceptable. The power differential between these two parties is such that one person will always be inappropriately vulnerable to the influence or control of the other. Although sexual expression always makes a person vulnerable, a norm that attends to the appropriateness of that vulnerability in the context of power in relationships is protective of the developmental maturation process that contributes to human sexual flourishing.

The fourth norm for sexual ethics follows from the previous norm dealing with power and vulnerability; partnered sexual expression must embody a mutual relationship. Such a mutual relationship will include a sense of reciprocal respect and dignity between partners. Sexual expression in such mutual relationship will thus adhere to the minimum requirements that there is consent between partners[35] and that no intentional harm is done. Given that the current Western hetero-normative social structure supports a tacit relational bias towards male sexual privilege, the attainment of mutuality in sexual expression is particularly difficult for adolescent females. Assuming the pre-requisites for personal and sexual flourishing (the assumption of the goodness of both female sexual knowledge and female sexual pleasure) and the norm of personal sexual awareness, it is possible to envision a social conversion towards relational mutuality. Truly to commit to female flourishing, we must also commit to sexual and relational mutuality as normative.

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[35] Although I recognize the ambiguity of "consent" as a requirement for sexual expression (for example, in the simultaneous occurrence of consent, coercion, desire, and acquiescence), in the context of a mutual relationship the negotiation of ambivalence between partners contributes to its very character as mutual.

A fifth norm for sexual ethics implies an intentional openness to fruitfulness in sexual expression, although this openness need not be physical. Heterosexual sexual expression clearly has creation as one of its purposes. There is no sense positing that sex in and of itself can be totally removed from its procreative possibilities. An awareness of the possibility of children resulting from heterosexual intercourse seems inherent to its undertaking. However, that procreative possibility need not be normatively present in sexual expression. Rather, intentional openness to creative possibilities arising from sexual intimacy implies a broader understanding of human sexual persons and acknowledges that not every act of sexual intercourse will be potentially procreative.[36] While mindful of the reproductive possibilities and pitfalls that arise with heterosexual sexual intercourse, they need not override the broader relational aspects of sexual intimacy.

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[36] Christian wisdom has long acknowledged that couples physically unable to have children, for a variety of reasons, still behave morally when sexually active. We recognize the value of sexual intimacy in such situations, regardless of its lack of procreative possibility. The creative possibilities of physical expression here surpass mere physical procreativity and heteronormativity.

Finally, sexual expression must entail commitment to self, to other, and to God. At its simplest, relational commitment serves to delay sexual intercourse, and such a delay promotes immediate and long-term sexual flourishing. Beyond the practical, however, we recognize the divinity of the sexual gift, and the ways in which we see God in relationship with others and self. Such human relationship must envision some promise of the future, some entrusting of a share of one's personal well-being to another. Relational commitment provides a sense not just of momentary pleasure, but also of continued development in flourishing. Given the disparity of interpretation of sexual experience between males and females in general, but especially so among adolescents, commitment as normative is particularly important in heterosexual relationships. Further, in recognizing a future orientation as normative for ethical sexual expression, we attest in human relationship to the tension between what is already now, but not yet. Flourishing is not facilitated by individual experiences void of context. Rather, flourishing implies a past and a future into which this experience is woven: a context of meaning. To flourish, we need a sense of our place in the world that provides a modicum of security.[37] Such relational commitment serves to insulate our sexual vulnerability through its promotion of trust and mutual respect.

My proposal of these six norms for ethical sexual activity that is appropriate to adolescent females is hardly the end the discussion. Much investigation remains to be undertaken as regards adolescent females, sexuality, and flourishing. The layered reality of individual girls' experiences as both sexual and spiritual persons sits hidden beneath the weight of centuries of social construction. The discussion of their flourishing is now only beginning. And thus I state with humility and openness dynamic proposals for sexual normativity. I hope for their unfolding over time in God's renewed and ongoing revelation of herself in the world. And I expect for their more adequate articulation as our understanding of human sexuality increases over time.

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[37] As is well noted by both Traina (1999), and Fine and McClelland (2006).

Brave New Girl: Summary

Within the framework of a feminist natural law, the realities of adolescent girls' sexualities are methodologically and procedurally included in the formulation of a sexual theology. In turn, this sexual theology sits squarely within the Roman Catholic theological tradition, its content a reflection of a meta-analysis of data relevant to girls' experiences. While the proposal of such content in the form of pre-requisites for the flourishing of adolescent girls and the norms that accompany them are universally accessible, still their application will be concrete and particular in the lives of adolescent females. Further, my proposition of them is accompanied by a humility that recognizes their very substance as tentative and revisable.

The Christian faith recognizes the human capacity for sin in the form of inattention, stupidity, unreasonableness, imprudence, and indifference. The between-times experience of the Christian story acknowledges that although we may see now what we ought to do, still we might not see it clearly. In beatitude, we will see all truth face-to-face, yet in our current circumstance, truth can be vague (1 Cor 13:12). Thus the tension of sin and grace colours moral reflection in Christian sexual ethics. This tension is particularly palpable in the lives of adolescents who live squarely in the moral, developmental ambiguity between childhood and adulthood. Given the developmental realities proposed in current empirical evidence, our sexual theology must be mindful of the disparity of moral capacity between adolescents and adults.

The sexual theology that I propose is one focused on the sexual (both individual and social) realities of girls and women. This theology gives hermeneutical preference to females' experiences of sexuality as a means of highlighting their particular questions in sexual morality. This hermeneutical privilege provides unique insight into the dearth of such engagement in the historical and traditional development of sexual theology. That females' sexual pleasure, for instance, has never been explicitly incorporated into a discussion of sexual norms indicates that females' perspectives have been largely irrelevant in the Christian tradition of sexual theology.

In constructing a theology that privileges females' perspectives, adolescent females' perspectives in particular, my hope is to forward an inclusive sexual theological discourse within the Roman Catholic tradition. Such inclusive discourse takes for granted the communal nature of faith development and learning. Our recognition of the developmental realities of adolescence requires our on-going discussion of adult mentorship in adolescents' sexual lives. Their incomplete capacity to integrate the various aspects of sexuality and sexual experience (i.e., cognitive, affective, spiritual, physical, relational) means that ethical patience is required in the articulation and reinforcement of sexual ethical norms. We cannot expect a theology aimed at typically full-capacity adults necessarily to be successful in the lives of adolescents. In short, we as adults have work to do.

By no means do I consider my proposal definitive or complete. However, the explicit inclusion of adolescent females' sexual realities in sexual theological ethics marks a moment of awakening to the missing discourses that plague our history and tradition. Surely this entry into sexual theology must also impact Catholic and Christian sexual education. To assert that sexual theology itself has traditionally and historically been lacking in its account of human sexuality is also to assert a dearth of attention to varying developmental capacities successfully to integrate personal sexuality. Thus renewed consideration must be given to the method, procedure, and content of sexual education curricula within Catholic and Christian school settings. The concluding chapter of this dissertation will provide some insight into what such consideration might include.

CHAPTER 5 - WHAT WAS I THINKING?

Indeed, what was I thinking? What would lead anyone to delve into the crossroads of adolescent female sexuality, developmental psychology, and sexual theology?

I came to this project out of my own experiences and curiosities. I am a Roman Catholic theologian working in the area of morality and ethics. And I am a psychological counselor, working primarily with adolescent girls and women. This dissertation topic makes perfect sense to me, because I live the confluence of the disparate disciplines in my personal and professional lives. I knew, however, that there would be difficulties associated with undertaking a project that speaks so explicitly of female sexuality, particularly adolescent female sexuality.

I understood that opening the Pandora's box of sexuality, faith, and adolescence could be dangerous, since discussion of these topics in concurrence has historically been taboo. Yet I undertook this enterprise out of an abiding love of God, the Church, and females. I would like coming generations of girls and young women discovering their sexualities within communities of faith to experience the wisdom of women who have come before them; to see their lives in the teachings of the Church; to hear their voices in the prayers of the faithful; to know that their sexualities are good and holy. And although this dissertation is a mere drop in the ocean of necessary sex-talk, it is a hopeful drop; less of a tear and more of a tonic.

In the course of researching and writing this dissertation I have experienced insights and revelations aplenty. These experiences have been variously disconcerting (unnerving, even), vindicating, and gratifying. However, each revelation and insight has also been a divine gift of grace. Questions have arisen for me that beg responses from my mind and heart. This task has not been easy. To open myself to the possibilities stemming from an empirical investigation such as this in concert with a centuries-old theological tradition has required a proverbial leap of faith into the gentle arms of Eden. I have had to trust that the Holy Spirit would indeed inspire me towards true and faithful conclusions.

I write the words "true" and "faithful" fully cognizant of their multivalent interpretations and applications in the Academy and in the Church. I believe that God frequently reveals herself to us in the strangest of places and, certainly, contrary to our expectations. Although I had anticipated some of the revelations (particularly those of an intellectual nature) in advance of venturing into this project, I admittedly was not prepared for the maelstrom of emotional insight my work was to bring. Without romanticizing the experience of writing any doctoral dissertation, suffice to say that I on occasion considered the cost of continuing too high. I am now inextricably tied to this project, however, and cannot imagine my world without having completed it. I was not prepared to feel vulnerable, strong, despairing, hopeful, bored, interested, anxious, and peaceful about the topic and the work, often simultaneously. I am humbled.

Nor was I prepared for others' responses to my work. I could not have anticipated the interest, insecurity, curiosity, caution, disdain, excitement, and intrigue with which I have met in the discussion of my work. There have been no predictors of others' varied reactions to hearing the words orgasm, women, menstruation, patriarchy, girls, theology, sexism, flourishing, and God strung together within a single academic exploration. Dealing with some of these responses has been, at times, more difficult than the researching and writing involved in such an extensive undertaking.

The weeks after being contemptuously called a *bitch* for using the word *menstruation* at the lunch table were emotionally excruciating for me. My own sauciness aside, the name-calling accomplished, for a while, exactly its intention: I was uncertain, torn, shamed, and put in my (female) place. Upon extensive prayer, reflection, and consultation with very wise women and men, I moved forward, and chose to claim that episode as the defining moment in my writing. That I was named a bitch for using a term referencing an occurrence common to half of the human population indicated to me that my work was long overdue. So, with all due respect to the insecure, the disdainful, and the demeaning others who question the necessity of this work, the bitch is back, and she has something to say.

It became apparent to me early in the process that I had identified this question as a means of understanding my own history as a young Catholic female grappling with Church teaching. I wondered if what the Church had offered to my contemporaries and I was indeed able to facilitate our growth as faithful and sexual females. As I have evolved as a theologian, my understanding of the will of God as it is revealed in human history has come to rely heavily on a thick account of human flourishing. That is, in the personal and communal realities of human interaction with the world, God calls us to herself in our movement towards the fullness of humanity. The response to this call is difficult, filled with ambivalence and the tension of already knowing now the presence of God, but not yet knowing that presence fully.

We see the Divine but through a veil. Our movement in her direction is coloured with false starts, wrong turns, potholes, and roadblocks. Yet so too is our movement touched by helpful neighbors, breakthroughs and insights, and bridges of grace. So it has been with me. My thick flourishing is not mine alone. I have met with angels and demons as I have made my way to God. Every day is a revelation of my own humanity in the face of divinity, and of the divinity of humanity in the face of revelation. I have, therefore, been mindful of my own flourishing as I have explored the intersection of dialogues regarding sexuality, theology, and adolescent females. And I have been mindful of others' contributions to my own flourishing – my community in the Divine.

I am in this work, body and soul. I see the face of God in working through what might facilitate sexual flourishing among adolescent females simply by virtue of knowing their sexuality is God's own gift to them. It is admittedly a tricky business stewarding this gift well, particularly in the full flush of adolescent development. However, persons attend to experiences and information; we intelligently question those experiences in the hope of understanding them; we make reasonable judgements about the veracity of our understanding; and we act responsibly on what we know, all towards the manifestation of God's grace in our own lives. We hope for flourishing.

The current of flourishing as a criterion for an appropriate sexual theology of adolescent females thus flows throughout this investigation. General female flourishing, adolescent female flourishing, general female sexual flourishing, and adolescent female sexual flourishing all serve as the lodestone by which I evaluate the adequacy of the methodology, procedure, and content of our sexual theology. As noted above, I perceive flourishing as a multi-faceted human experience: it is not merely spiritual, intellectual, emotional, or physical. Flourishing is, rather, the synthesis of well-being among these possibilities in the particular individual and social realities of actual persons.

There are significant obstacles to and pre-requisites for general human and sexual flourishing, complicated as flourishing is by the consistent movement of sin and grace in our lives. We will make both right and wrong, and good and bad choices. We will mistake the already now for what is not yet. We will strive towards the Divine and still remain human. Yet to flourish is not to transcend the human, but to be fully human in search of the Divine. We attend to the presence of God in our lives and try, through growth in faith and maturity, to interpret and act on her will. We watch for signs and read them as we are able. And with humility, we find grace. Usually when we least expect it. So it is with sexuality. So it is with faith. So it is with adolescence.

Flourishing is not a destination; it is a journey into and with the heart of God: the human person fully alive.

What Have I Done?

In light of the above, the following is an overview of my dissertation. The process of addressing the discrete discourses of adolescent female development regarding sexuality and Roman Catholic sexual theology yields interesting results. In articulating a sexual theology appropriate to adolescent females and proposing a normative content for that theology, implications for Catholic sex and sexuality education arise. This articulation also points to further questions for fruitful research. Prior to mapping what I believe to be questions for Catholic sexual education and directions for future study, I retrace the steps that I have taken.

Step One: Natural Law and Sexual Theology

In the second chapter of this thesis I first considered the foundational basis for my work. I explored various manifestations of natural law theory within the history and tradition of Roman Catholic ethical thought. Starting with Thomas Aquinas, then moving to the Basic Goods Theory and Revisionist Theory, I provided an overview of these helpful, yet, for my purposes, inadequate formulations of natural law. I turned for my definitive theoretical base to Cristina Traina's feminist natural law theory. Traina's theory incorporates a methodology, procedure, and substance that is open to consideration of women's experiences and thus yields a normative content inclusive of women. Second, I explored various Christian theologies of the body, including Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, erotic body theologies, and feminist sexual theologies of the body. This exploration outlined both the contributions of body theologies to the sexual theological enterprise and the ensuing gaps in its content. I proposed that, ultimately, a sexual theology appropriate to contemporary females must methodologically and procedurally attend to their particular and universal experiences. To this end, in the third chapter I addressed adolescent females' sexual realities.

Step Two: Adolescent Females' Sexual Realities

As Cristina Traina's feminist natural law formulation proposes, the only way to ensure that a sexual theology will adequately address the thick existential needs of female flourishing is to incorporate their lives both methodologically and procedurally into its content. In the third chapter of this dissertation, I investigated key factors in adolescent female sexual development: gender, sexual-identity, self-identity, biological and neural development, menarche, social influence, and attention to flourishing. From this investigation of empirical data, it is clear that the sexual and general developmental flourishing of adolescent girls is highly contextualized, ambivalently socially received, and paradoxically both hidden and overtly sexualized. The ambiguity of the Western social response to adolescent female sexuality runs parallel to a virtual silence of females' voices in historical formulations of Christian sexual theologies. In the fourth chapter, I provided a synthesis of the discrete discourses of adolescent female sexual realities and a feminist natural law approach to sexual theology.

Step Three: Synthesis and Construction

To construct a feminist natural law formulation of sexual theology that is attentive to females' (particularly adolescent females') experiences of sex and sexuality, in the fourth chapter of this dissertation I integrated the discrete discourses of adolescent female sexual developmental realities and Roman Catholic sexual theologies. I inquired into the substantive contributions of empirical data regarding adolescents' sexualities to a sexual theology that will facilitate their flourishing. The result of this inquiry is the articulation both of pre-requisites to sexual flourishing and a normative sexual theological content. My articulation is, I believe, faithful to the Thomistic and feminist methodological formulations of natural law, and procedurally inclusive of females' voices and experiences of their sexualities. While the normative content of my sexual theology departs from the official Roman Catholic tradition, still it reflects a personalist approach (mindful of Pope John Paul II) to human sexual development, maturity, and relationship. That is, the morality of sexual expression is based upon acting subjects in their contexts and relationships with God and others, rather than upon its location in a person's particular state in life.

Clearly the weight of such a proposal is heavy. To depart from the tradition in this manner requires the thought and prayer due a maturing Catholic spirituality and faith. It also requires attention to vast amounts of data and echoing voices not previously incorporated into sexual theological discourse. I do not take this digression lightly, nor do I propose it with a dismissive attitude. The values that underscore the Christian sexual theological tradition remain, for the most part, solidly in place within my theological formulation. My integration of empirical and theological discourses within the human, loving enterprise, however, led me to understand God's great gift of sexuality and sexual expression rather less tied to marital state than does the tradition. I am mindful of the abuses of sexuality, persons, and relationships that ensue when sexual expression is taken lightly, debased, exploited, or discarded. I do not believe, however, that marriage necessarily protects from any of these abuses. What does protect from these abuses, to whatever extent possible, is a loving and faithful inter-generational openness to conversation, education, and support of sexual development and appropriate sexual expression, that is, sexual flourishing. A social commitment (including the Church community) to confronting abuses and nurturing healthy sexualities is paramount in the formation of sexually mature Christian persons.

We do not emerge from the womb sexually aware and prepared to integrate our sexuality in a healthy and faith-filled way. This task is rather more developmental. Over time, as our biological, neurological, social, affective, cognitive, and spiritual selves are integrated, we become better able to recognize the presence of God in our relationships. We become better able to discern the meaning of God's presence in those relationships. And we become better able to act prudently in accord with that discernment. This task is, of course, difficult and charged with the ambiguity of the already now/not yet character of our Christian experience. We thus require mentorship to attain the elusive wisdom of the body. To this end, Catholic (and other Christian) sexuality education is faced with the monumental responsibility of facilitating faithful prudent reflection and practical wisdom in human sexual expression.

What Remains to be Done

Implications for Roman Catholic Sexuality Education

When considering Roman Catholic sexuality education for adolescents, a reaffirmation of the wisdom of the theological tradition is necessary. Sexuality education cannot abandon the values ensconced in the tradition that have served and continue to serve us well: commitment, chastity, prudence, mutuality, maturity, gift, responsibility, dignity, relationship, and respect among them. In teaching and modeling these values with regard to sex, sexuality, and sexual expression, the Christian community invites children, adolescents, and adults to reflect prayerfully on the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives. This ought to be a process begun early in the faith journey that continues throughout a life of faith and human development. It does not reach its final destination until we rest face-to-face with the Divine. These values are consistently reflected in the modern history of official Church teaching (e.g., Catechism, 1995; CDF, 2004, 1987 & 1986; John Paul II, 1995a, 1993, 1988, 1981; Paul VI, 1968).

For all of its reliance on a sound values-foundation for sexual teachings, still contemporary official sexual teaching encounters methodological difficulties in its movement from general values to absolute moral norms regarding sexual expression, prior to exploration of the empirical data of human experience.[1] A further difficulty, particularly in regard to sexuality education, is that the meaning and definition of the values are abstract from particular human lives.[2] When we methodologically and procedurally exclude the voices of the very persons we hope to address, the implementation of the content in educational environments seems removed from and perhaps even irrelevant to their lives.[3] This irrelevance is compounded by the official Church hierarchy's reluctance to explore sexual topics (both positive and negative) openly among the faithful and attend to their experiences.[4] The curious result of this methodological exclusion of adolescent female (and other) voices in the construction of official sexual theology is a rather local approach to practical educational issues. That is, various canonical jurisdictions provide statements and guidelines regarding Catholic education in general and Catholic sexuality education in particular. While there are striking similarities among them, there also exist subtle differences.

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[1] Masturbation is a good example of the movement from values to norms without any methodological or procedural attention to empirical data. Despite empirical evidence indicating that not only is masturbation normal in sexual development, but also helpful in facilitating long-term sexual knowledge and flourishing, the Church maintains that "masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action" and an offence against chastity (CCC, no. 2352).

[2] Again, this concern is highlighted in revisionist, post-modern, and post-structuralist discourses about the nature of "universal moral norms" and their wholesale application to disparate peoples and situations.

[3] I recently found online an interesting example of a young Catholic's frustration at being excluded from official Roman Catholic sexual teaching. This female student at Fordham University (a well-respected Catholic [Jesuit] University in New York) spoke to the dissonance between the lives of her and her peers and official Catholic teaching: "Until young Catholics are provided with a sexual ethic that reflects their experience, rather than what they perceive to be an ironclad list of unjustified rules, they will continue to make decisions about sexuality without religion as an authority" (Julia Tier, "Sex and the University: How does the Church speak to the experience of younger Catholics?" Retrieved online January 28, 2008: www.BustedHalo.com).

[4] For instance, I am profoundly respectful of the values that inform Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, yet his own personalist stance seems surprisingly devoid of actual accounts of human bodies and sexualities. Thus the theology itself, while upholding the traditional values of the Church in substance, in practice ignores actual human experience in favour of a pre-lapsarian ideal of human sexual expression. It seems humanly unattainable.

Following is a brief exploration of four examples of Roman Catholic documents aimed at sexuality education among young Catholics.

Human Sexuality Education: Four Roman Catholic Documents

The first two general statements descend from the Pontifical Council for the Family (PCF) (1996) of the Roman Catholic Church, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family*, and the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) (1983), *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Guidelines for Sex Education*. These documents are official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and outline the broad values and moral norms pertaining to sexuality and sexual expression, while further addressing sexuality education in the Catholic context. Regarding their theological content, both documents strongly reflect Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body and his distinctive articulation of sex, sexuality, the human body, human relationships, and marriage, as created and instituted by God. Both documents thus assume a relational complementarity between males and females (the nuptial meaning of the body), the morally normative expression of sexuality within the context of heterosexual marriage, and the ultimate authority of the Magisterium in interpreting the will of God regarding moral matters.[5] They both reiterate the Church's understanding of chastity as the successful integration of sexuality within the person, as it pertains to various states in life (i.e., virgin, spouse, widow). And they both underscore the values of prudence, commitment, love, and fecundity inherent to marital sexual expression.

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[5] The Church understands itself as the final arbiter of truth regarding teachings of faith and morals. In recognizing the authority of the Magisterium, all Catholics are called to be faithful to its interpretations and teachings: "The three primary sources of catechesis are closely related to each other. Sacred Scripture, first of all, is God's own speech put down under influence of the Spirit. Sacred Tradition, secondly, transmits this divine speech down through history to us today. And the Magisterium gives it an authentic interpretation" (Huebsch, 2003, p. 39). Hence Catholic education and catechesis evolve within the context of a hierarchical structure determining truth for all. This perspective is most authoritatively expressed in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), an exploration of the place of the Magisterium in determining and promulgating truth on matters of morality.

Regarding the two documents' articulations of sexuality education within the Roman Catholic context, although they address sex education in different settings (i.e., the family and the broader Catholic community), still they both reiterate the long-standing position of the Church that parents are the "first and principal educators of their children" (PCF, 1996, no. 5).[6] This particular point is a weighty one when considering sexuality education of Roman Catholic children. Parents are the final authorities regarding their children's exposure to educational materials, whether in the school context or in the home. The documents acknowledge, however, that not all parents are well-equipped to provide their children with adequate sexuality education; such education can be difficult and messy. The community of the Church, therefore, within schools, youth organizations, and sacramental life, must respect the principle of subsidiarity and endeavor to provide appropriate and adequate sexuality education throughout the developmental lives of children, adolescents, and adults alike. These two documents, however, refrain from any detailed account of sexuality education within Roman Catholic contexts. They invite local Episcopal authorities to formulate educational programs more specific to their particular contexts, while remaining mindful of and in harmony with official Church teaching.

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[6] In *Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education)* (1965b), a document of the Second Vatican Council, the Church states unequivocally both the right and the responsibility of parents to secure their children's education. "Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and men that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs" (no. 3).

The third document I consider here is just such an effort by the United States Catholic Conference/National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCC/NCCB): *Human Sexuality: A Catholic perspective for education and lifelong learning* (1991). The document is offered "to guide… diocesan leaders in their service to parents, parishes, and other church-related institutions as they design and implement programs of formal instruction in human sexuality from a Catholic perspective" (USCC/NCCB, 1991, p. 2). Like the documents descending from the Vatican, this document reaffirms the values and moral norms permeating the Roman Catholic understanding of human sexuality and sexual expression. This document also reiterates the privileged place of parents in their children's education, particularly their sexuality education. *Human Sexuality* differs from the Vatican documents, however, in its pastoral focus and practical recommendations. For instance, while maintaining a substantive focus on Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, the document also generally acknowledges actual human sexual development through the lifespan. In its practical recommendations, *Human Sexuality* recognizes the need for teachers themselves to possess a mature and integrated healthy sexuality in order effectively to address sexual realities with others. And, importantly, the document strongly expresses the Church's commitment to a values-based comprehensive sexuality education that prepares young people for growth into their sexuality.[7]

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[7] Abstinence-based and abstinence-only education have found extensive political popularity in the United States, following the implementation of Title V, Section 510 of the *Personal Responsibility and*

In its commitment to existing moral norms regarding human sexual behaviour, however, *Human sexuality* (USCC/NCCB, 1991) perpetuates the methodological and procedural oversight of females' sexual realities. Although willing to acknowledge, for instance, the challenges of adolescent sexuality, the document fails methodologically and procedurally to incorporate empirical knowledge of adolescent female realities into normative expectations. Thus the values (e.g., self-giving, reciprocity), virtues (e.g., chastity, prudence), and norms (e.g., abstinence) are situated outside of adolescents' actual lives. Chastity and abstinence, for example, are rather contextually determined among adolescents and, thus, as a virtue and a norm do little to engage them where they are.[8] The content of teaching regarding human sexuality and sexual expression remain disconnected from their lives.[9]

Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Trenholm, Devaney, Fortson, Quay, Wheeler, & Clark, 2007). This Act states that federal funding is available only to sexuality education programs that adhere to abstinence-only philosophy and practice. It is important to note that this popularity has not made its way into Canadian sexuality education (at least not to the same extent) and does not reflect the official position of the Roman Catholic Church regarding sexuality education. Also important to note is that follow-up research into the effectiveness of limiting access to significant information regarding sex and sexuality in the education of adolescents shows abstinence-only education's ineffectiveness (Borawski, Trapl, Lovegreen, Colabianchi, & Block, 2005; Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers, Summers, & Schleifer, 2006; Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2006; Thomas, 2000; Trenholm, et al., 2007; Underhill, Montgomery, & Operario, 2007; Waxman, 2004). As an ideal method of preventing negative outcomes of adolescent sexual activity, abstinence relies on 100% success in its application by its users. Given the developmental realities of adolescence, evidence shows that 100% success is an unlikely outcome.

[8] In my recommendations (below) for further empirical studies of adolescent girls and sexuality, I include the exploration of adolescent girls' practical perceptions of terms such as "chastity", "abstinence", "purity", and "virginity". Existing studies suggest that adolescents' perceptions of these terms depart significantly from adults' perceptions, particularly among adolescents taking chastity pledges (Goodson, Suther, Pruitt, & Wilson, 2003). One study further suggests that there is no common understanding of these terms among adolescents, even though they are commonly used in abstinence-only sexuality education programs (Bersamin, Fisher, Walker, Hill, & Grube, 2007).

[9] King and Freitas (2003) suggest that this disconnection continues past adolescence and into the young adult lives of unmarried Christians. Because the Christian Church offers little between abstinence and marriage as appropriate determiners of sexual and relational status, many Christian single people, who are well past their young adult years, feel experientially alienated from the Church.

Disengagement of young Catholics from their own sexuality education is problematic on two fronts. First, it is problematic in the development of a sexual theology that incorporates their lived experiences of sexuality. I have outlined this point above. Second, disengagement of young Catholics from their own sexuality education is problematic in the development of sex and sexuality education curricula. While the Roman Catholic documents addressed above reflect official Church teaching regarding sexuality (CCE, 1983; PCF, 1996) and, to a certain extent, incorporate a pastoral understanding of adolescent sexuality (USCC/NCCB, 1991), they do not explicitly incorporate the sexual realities of adolescent females (and others) in the development of curricula.

To demonstrate this second point, I now turn to a fourth and final Roman Catholic document regarding sexuality education: the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' (CCCB) religious education curriculum for Grade Ten, *Christ and Culture* (2001a, 2001b). I have chosen this particular curriculum because, within the entire religious education curriculum formulated by the CCCB (i.e., Kindergarten to Grade Twelve, excluding Grade Eleven), sexuality education for adolescents is explicitly included here. The Theme "Intimacy, Sexuality, and Love" is located in the middle of a Unit entitled "Relating to the Other". The overall focus of the Grade Ten curriculum is to provide guidance to young Catholics living within the particular cultural setting of Canada. Its overall aim is "to assist young persons, with the help of the gospel, to

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That is, the Christian theological tradition remains methodologically, procedurally, and substantively closed to their human experiences of relationships, sex, and sexuality.

participate as Catholics in the shaping of our culture" (CCCB, 2001a, p. 7). Sex and sexuality religious education is therefore placed within the broader context of the person in society.

The curricular and pedagogical questions here stem back to the methodological and procedural means of developing the curriculum. If the theology that underpins the curriculum itself is developed within a narrow and limited method and procedure (i.e., what information is considered, who determines that, and who contributes to the process of its development), then the content of the curriculum will reflect a theology exclusive of the experiences of those for whom it is being developed. Thus the curriculum itself will reflect what Paulo Freire (1999) would term a hierarchical perspective from a dominant group. Freire advocates for a pedagogy that in fact does not assume truth from the hierarchical perspective of one dominant group. Rather, he develops the notion of *conscientizacao,* the process of a dominated group(s) learning to perceive their socio-cultural situations and to be active in addressing the silence of their voices in the dominant perspective. For Freire, education is not so much about the "banking" of information from a dominant group into other dominated groups as it is about the acts of cognition that inform praxis (i.e., practice informed by theory): "the action and reflection of men and women [and adolescents?] upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1999, p. 60).[10]

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[10] The spirit and explicit teaching of Vatican II also encourages thorough and adequate conscience development among the faithful in moral decision-making (parallel to Freire's *conscientizacao):* "In the depths of his [sic] conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to his heart more specifically: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God [i.e., Divine and Natural Law]. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged.

Michael Apple offers a philosophical complement to Freire; he also advocates an approach to education that assumes an open understanding of knowledge and truth, and affirms the reality of difference between and among learners and teachers. Two specific points that Apple makes are relevant here. First, Apple recognizes that in presenting information as though its inclusion in a curriculum is characterized by consensus we hide the reality of conflict in the development and evolution of knowledge (Apple, 1971). In so doing, we conceal the necessity of conflict in human learning and present a whitewashed understanding of knowledge. Second, Apple points out that the information presented as truth is in fact the presentation of information serving the interests of a dominant group (Apple, 1990). Thus knowledge is not open to scrutiny regarding what and whose knowledge is most important to learn. Apple asks the question highlighted by Freire: How do non-dominant groups voice their knowledge when the texts of information are created by and serve the interests of the dominant group (Apple, 1990)?

The concerns of Freire and Apple regarding dominant knowledge in pedagogy and curriculum development are reflected in the religious education curriculum addressing sexuality education. Because adolescent realities, experiences, and

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"Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more that a correct conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by objective norms of morality" (*Gaudium et spes*, 1965a, no. 16).

In contrast to Vatican II's affirmation of individual conscience formation, Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) is more explicitly insistent that adequate conscience formation is only so when its conclusions are consistent with official magisterial teachings.

interpretations of sex and sexuality are missing from the development of sexual theology, they are, in effect, learning about themselves from a dominant group, with a dominant perspective of knowledge. While it is unhelpful to conclude that, in fact, adult theologians and developers of curricula within the Church are completely ignorant of adolescent realities, still it is helpful to conclude that adolescents are not. Here I recall Traina's (1999) feminist natural law formulation that calls for an inclusive methodology and procedure in the process of deriving normative theological content.

Returning to the Grade Ten religious education curriculum itself, while the theme "Intimacy, Sexuality, and Love" is well-situated within a theological discussion of values and human relationships, the *Teachers' Manual* (2001a) explicitly notes that the material within that particular Section is considered important, but not essential within the curriculum. The choice rests with individual teachers whether or not to explore the topic at all. Thus a question reaching beyond both pedagogy and curriculum is whether or not students are introduced to *any* sex or sexuality information in their religious education contexts. If students are to become mature and capable moral decision-makers in their sexual development, they must actually have access to the information relevant to their decision-making and learn to engage it critically. One task of catechesis (i.e., teaching the faith) with adolescents that Carotta identifies is "to help young people attend to their existing faith experiences" (2002, p. 42).

As the data in preceding chapters support, issues pertaining to sexuality and intimacy are very much a part of the experiences of adolescents today. By the time they are in Grade Eleven in Canada, 46% of adolescent females and 40% of adolescent males have had sexual intercourse at least once. In the same demographic group, 52% of females and 53% of males have had oral sex at least once (Boyce, Doherty, Fortin, & Mackinnon, 2003, pp. 74-76). Not only are adolescents sexually active in numerous ways; they are also curious about sex and sexuality. Risch and Lawler (2003) indicate that adolescents themselves claim to "want to know and understand 'everything' about sexuality" (p. 67).

The relevance of sex and sexuality education for adolescents in North American contemporary culture seems obvious. Because sexuality is one aspect of the whole person in relationship with all other personal aspects, it follows that sexuality is an aspect of the faith experiences of adolescents today. It also follows that not teaching about sex and sexuality in a faith context, or teaching only about sexual chastity and abstinence, will not suffice.[11] Sexuality education ought to endeavor to integrate sexuality within the person as a whole rather than to isolate various facets of sexuality in teaching (e.g., biological, social, personal, relational, spiritual). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCC) (1991) succinctly points out the objectives of Catholic sexuality education:

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[11] Again, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church regarding sexuality education is that it ought to occur as a comprehensive endeavor to integrate the whole person within his/her faith life. That is, abstinence-only education is insufficient. Risch and Lawler's (2003) study of Catholic teens' perceptions of sexuality education in Catholic contexts supports the effectiveness of a broader approach to sexuality education than abstinence-only. This education, they propose, must become an integrated effort among those within the Catholic community, including teens, parents, teachers, mentors, pastors, etc.

> Sexuality education is not reducible to a set of simple teaching materials about human organ systems and their biological functions. Nor can it be taught in one isolated course or in the abstract realm of theory alone. The ultimate objective of education in human sexuality is the personal realization of total sexual identity and the affective maturation of the learner. (USCC, 1991, p. 75)

The Bishops here acknowledge the complex reality of human sexuality and its integration within the psychological, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of the person and they provide pastoral attention to the thickness of human sexual experience.

The pastoral acknowledgement of the United States Bishops, however, appears somewhat inconsistent with the application of the Church's moral teachings regarding sexuality. While officially stating that human sexuality encompasses the whole person, the Church's actual moral teachings tend to focus heavily on sexual acts themselves, as opposed to the moral agent as a whole. For instance, critics of *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968) (the watershed document in the 20th century of Roman Catholic teaching on sexuality) have identified its act-focused morality with regard to the use of artificial contraception as a major stumbling block in its practical application.[12]

We return here to the importance of method and procedure in the development and teaching of sexual theology. For even if pastoral statements acknowledge sexual complexity in human experiences, the official teachings formulated independently of the sexual experiences and interpretations of the faithful fall short in their application to people's lives. There remains a perpetual gap between the official teachings and the lived experiences of the faithful that acts as a stumbling block to their relevance in people's lives. This reality holds, most pointedly, for adolescent females. They are not the dominant group within the Church, theirs is not the dominant knowledge that prevails, and thus their experiences remain on the margins of both official teaching and sexuality education within the Roman Catholic context.

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[12] Shannon (1970) nicely summarizes the early debate within the Church regarding *Humanae Vitae* (1968) in *The Lively Debate*.

What is unfortunate about this experiential gap is that the values informing the teachings are lost to those who reject outright the moral teachings themselves. And even when the values are articulated in educational contexts, the teachings themselves limit faithful engagement with the values. So, although many Roman Catholics are likely familiar with the content of the Church's teachings (e.g., no use of artificial contraceptives), it is unlikely that they can explain why. In the light of the methodological, procedural, and substantial shortfalls of official Roman Catholic moral teaching regarding sexuality and the curricula based explicitly on those teachings, there is room for further investigation into the areas I have introduced above. There is also significant room to develop lifelong sexuality education within the Church community. In the following section I identify some questions that have arisen from my work and some areas that might prove fruitful to this discussion with further study.

Questions Arising

As with any investigation, this project has brought many new inquiries to the fore. Thus the conclusions I reach above are immersed in persistent questions like the following: What is sexuality? Whose sexuality is considered? What is sex? What is human flourishing? What is human sexual flourishing? How is flourishing facilitated? How do we gauge flourishing? What is morally normative sexual behaviour? How might faith, religion, and/or spirituality facilitate sexual flourishing? To what extent are these aspects of the human experience relevant in sexual development? Who decides this? What ought sex and sexuality education to be? Who decides this? In what context should sexuality education take place? Who ought to facilitate this education? When ought sexuality education to happen? Who decides this?

These questions are only a few of the many arising from my work and they lead me to identify a number of areas for further study. Because I consider discrete disciplines in the course of my study, I also propose studies that might be best suited to the specific areas of curriculum and sexuality education, adolescent females and sexuality, and sexual theology.

Curriculum and Sexuality Education

Apart from Risch and Lawler's (2003) study of sexuality education and the Catholic adolescent, I found little research exploring adolescent females' experiences of sexuality education in Catholic settings. To construct a curriculum that meets the needs of adolescent females (and males, for that matter), further studies of their perceptions of sexuality education would be helpful. To that end, I suggest that both quantitative and qualitative studies investigate programs, adolescents' perceptions of these programs, and the success of the programs in meeting established goals. Further, I believe study of adolescents' attitudes and convictions regarding the relationships between and among religion, sexuality, theology, and sexual activity could inform curriculum development.

As I note above, some educational jurisdictions experience the impact of political and religious commitments to particular models of sexuality education. These commitments (e.g., abstinence-only sexuality education) trickle into the curriculum via financial controls and motivations. With regard to teaching and pedagogy, it would be useful to understand more systematically the ways in which political climates regarding sexuality education affect teachers who teach sexuality education. How do teachers respond to politically favoured philosophies of sexuality education (e.g., abstinence-only, abstinence-based, comprehensive)? Studies of the ways and extent to which politically favoured philosophies affect teachers' choices about what and how to teach sexuality education could prove helpful in understanding the efficacy of sexuality education programs. How comfortable are teachers in providing sexuality education within Catholic school systems in particular? Investigating the attitudes and comfort levels of Catholic teachers in providing sexuality education might also indicate the extent to which personal beliefs coincide with or digress from official Church teaching. If a disparity exists and teachers are not comfortable with teaching sexuality education, what is the impact on students? Are Catholic teachers even motivated to teach sexuality education? Finally, who teaches sexuality education? It would be helpful to investigate the levels of willingness, training, and competence of teachers assigned the task of providing sexuality education within the Catholic context.

For teachers to be adequately prepared to teach sexuality education within a Catholic school setting, specific resources must be in place to provide them with appropriate theological, practical, personal, and pedagogical skills. Sexuality education is steeped in cultural assumptions, biases, and attitudes towards sexuality and sexual expression. Teachers must be open and willing to engage this complex reality with solid theological discourse. They must be comfortable and authentic with their students and unflinchingly honest in their discussion. Teachers must also prayerfully engage their own sexuality and faith. But for this to be possible, they must work within a climate that encourages them to be open, comfortable, authentic, and unflinchingly honest with their students. Whether or not this climate currently exists is not clear.

Finally, studies investigating existing (if any) integrated programs of sexuality education, particularly within the Catholic community, that involve adolescents, parents, family, teachers, mentors, pastors, counselors, coaches, or guardians might prove useful in constructing a community-based template for sexual education. When the multi-faceted nature of sexuality is practically acknowledged in the various realms of adolescents' lives, would it be possible to facilitate a commitment to life-long dialogue about sexuality and sexual expression? If the Church advocates for the integration of sexuality within the person (which it does), we ought to know if such a commitment is practically sustainable in the Catholic community.

Adolescent Females and Sexuality

Sex and sexuality education ought to be based on some empirical and philosophical commitment to adolescents' sexual flourishing. In the case of adolescent females, the inclusion of their voices in the development of Catholic curriculum will begin with our attention to their lived experiences of sexuality and faith. Thus some incorporation of empirical evidence investigating these experiences is necessary.

Discerning how best to provide sexuality education in Catholic contexts requires exploration of the role that Catholic affiliation or identification plays in adolescents' perceptions of themselves as sexual. Both qualitative and quantitative studies could provide insight into the ways adolescent females perceive their faith in relationship to personal sexual development, sexual decision-making, sexual identity, gender identity, self-esteem, and self-perception. Although there exist studies examining these adolescent issues in relation to the more general "religiousity", "spirituality", or "Christianity", few studies look specifically at the Catholic ethos in the lives of adolescent girls. In this same vein, studies that investigate how adolescent females perceive common terms like "chastity", "abstinence", "virginity", "sex", "sin", or "purity" might offer insight into their ensuing behaviours and both the positive and negative outcomes of sexuality education. In the official Catholic tradition, these terms are defined rather narrowly. Because these definitions are constructed outside of the experiences of adolescent girls, it is possible that they are either irrelevant to or differently perceived by them. A more accurate understanding of salient terminology within the body of the Catholic community might facilitate more effective sexual education and stronger perceived ties to the Church among adolescents.

Because Roman Catholic teaching emphasizes the moral obligation of parents for the education of their children, research investigating the perceptions and desires of parents regarding their adolescents' sexual education could prove instructive. Further, investigating parents' perceptions of their adolescents' sexuality and sexual activities might provide a more integrated, life-long approach to sexual education. Knowing that adolescents are highly influenced by their parents' values, attention to parents in sexuality education is paramount. The Church itself, as both institution and community, must therefore be open to frank inter-generational discussions about sexual development throughout the human lifespan. Methodologically speaking, such an endeavor could facilitate theological reflection about sexual values and norms among the Church community.

Also helpful would be qualitative studies examining adolescent females' attitudes, insights, and experiences of desire, ambiguity, sex, and relationship in connection to their personal and communal experiences of faith, spirituality, and religion. In the light of adolescent females' decided ambiguity regarding their own sexuality and sexual experiences, Catholic theology would benefit from investigation into the intersection of that ambiguity with adolescent faith perceptions and experiences. Following upon studies of this nature, it would be useful for the Church to consider ways in which theological discourse and religious education might facilitate more positive sexual development among adolescent females, particularly those within the Catholic community.

Finally, although discussion of sexuality ought to take place in age-appropriate ways throughout the lifecycle, I believe the onset of menstruation is a particularly potent moment for females. In this moment females are able to face squarely the creative potential of the human body and its development into maturity. Here the grace-filled and embodied nature of female sexuality is personified in adolescent initiation into creative possibility. This moment can be, I believe, a pivotal and positive faith experience of the sexual body. Given the ambivalent reception of menarche and menstruation in Western society (and the Church), however, menstruation is less celebrated and more bemoaned. How might the Church honour female sexuality more explicitly at this important developmental moment for girls? Based upon the strong tradition of ritual within the Roman Catholic community, perhaps we ought to consider the impact of, for example, a menarcheal ritual that recognizes the onset of puberty and sexual maturation on the sexual development of adolescent females. What might such a ritual include? Who would participate? What would be the objective? Specifically, how might the recognition of female movement towards faithful sexual maturity facilitate positive development and sexual flourishing?

Sexual Theology

With regard to sexual theology, I believe there is fertile ground yet to be explored in the contemporary Roman Catholic context. First, ongoing consideration of explicitly female sexualities, sexual experiences, and sexual identities is long overdue. Rather than assuming that general human sexuality is sufficient grounds for the development of sexual theology, further attention to females' sexual realities will offer rich nuances and reflect more adequately the whole of human sexuality. Such explicit and systematic integration is lacking in historical and contemporary theology, and its absence is apparent in the inadequacy of theological formulations.

For such an enterprise to be successful also requires honest reconsideration of females' roles within the Roman Catholic Church. The ways in which gender is constructed in official Church teaching and the concomitant assumptions and norms reflect a dearth of reflection on females' real lives. To loosen the bonds of normatively prescribed gender roles within the Church, open and ongoing interaction with theoretical discourses and practical realities is required. In the realm of theology, we must continue to engage relevant theories, such as theories of gender development, objectification, sexism, and sexualization, systematically and with vigour: we must develop a praxis that can liberate all persons from potentially harmful prescribed sex and gender roles. We must be willing to acknowledge difference and mystery in the actual manifestation of human sexuality.

Another key to constructing a sexual theology that adequately reflects the whole of human experience is to engage accounts of human sexuality with humility and openness. I have begun to explore empirical data towards the end of constructing a sexual theology accounting for adolescent females. More depth of exploration is required across the lifespan, however, to create a human sexual ethic more broadly applicable in theology. Such an exploration would not be to the exclusion of other sources of theology (i.e., scripture, tradition, and philosophy), but rather as a complement to the more traditional sources of ongoing revelation and articulation of God's will in human history. I further propose that, in so doing, theologians will formulate a sexual theology that is more attentive to and respectful of the differences and similarities among the human community.

Mindful of differences in human experience, further theological reflection on the ways in which Scripture addresses myriad human sexual experience, particularly females' sexual experiences, might provide more substance to the exploration of female general and sexual flourishing. In what ways does Scripture elucidate, even tangentially, the more philosophically rooted concept of human sexual flourishing and its prerequisites? Also, further exploration of the concept of "flourishing" in various human contexts would provide a thicker understanding of its richness in ethical thought. To date, consideration of flourishing has been limited primarily to academic discourse. What might a more broadly sweeping social conversation yield regarding flourishing itself, and sexual flourishing more specifically? How would the diversity of human experience play out in a systematic consideration of what we need to flourish?

As in the areas of curriculum and sexuality education, and adolescent females and sexuality, some clarification and study of specific terms would be helpful in sexual theology. For instance, the terms "chastity", "abstinence", and "self-giving" tend to be rather narrowly defined in official Church teaching, but more broadly understood in practical Christian experience. Ought we to be considering these terms less normatively tied to states in life and more practically tied to personal maturity, faith development, and relational responsibility? Is chastity the same for a thirteen-year-old female as it is for a twenty-nine-year-old male? Ought it to be? In this same light, is it true that sexual self-giving is total and complete within marriage? Ought it to be? Is it only so in marriage? What do the Christian faithful manifest in their sexual experiences? And to what extent ought we to be considering those experiences in our formulations of sexual theology? What are the human similarities and differences that inform sexual theology and facilitate its reception among the faithful?

Finally, I believe further and more fruitful engagement with popular culture and the media (beyond just criticism) must be included in the methodology and procedure of sexual theology. While a critique is definitely needed, still there are moments of hope in contemporary culture that must be acknowledged and encouraged. Christianity has sat and always will sit in the midst of a variety of cultures. If Christian scholarship does not engage the cultures in which it dwell (for my purposes, the Western sexual culture), there is little sense in critiquing it. The Roman Catholic tradition has developed within the historical, evolutionary reality of the human enterprise, not separate or removed from it. To place theology over against culture is to remove ourselves from the conversation altogether. This point is astonishingly salient with regard to adolescents and sexuality. The more we as a Church community are conversant with our current sexual climate, the more opportunity we have to mentor children and youth successfully through its joys and pitfalls.

Is That All There Is? Concluding Remarks

In the twilight of this dissertation ambivalence rests in my heart. I am sad to be concluding a work so wholly connected to myself. I am also happy, however, to be letting go, for now, of a project so wholly consuming of my life. We as a Church owe it to our young women and girls to attend to their flourishing as sexual human persons. Were it not so, I would not have invested my heart, soul, body, and time into a theological enterprise aimed at their well-being. The work that I have done to give initial voice to young females in theological discourse is really just the beginning. The work from here is to engage adolescent females proactively in the kinds of explorations I mention above. Human studies aimed at addressing the pressing questions left unanswered by my initial discussion of existing literature would provide rich soil for the development of sexual theology, particularly within the Roman Catholic tradition.

There is much to be done. The historical quagmire of human sexuality, gender, development, and flourishing meeting in faith remains uncharted to this day. Our contemporary Western context is such that we as a Church are called to a deep engagement with contemporary culture in theological discourse and human sexuality education. If we are to be successful in this endeavour, the values supporting this inquiry must be in dialogue with human sexual realities. If this conversation does not move forward, the Christian community will fail its young people in their sexual and faith development.

To have engaged feminist natural law in this initial process was my own recognition of a tradition that grapples with the already now/not yet, the contingent/universal human reality. My work has necessarily been a limited undertaking. Those carrying on this task into the future must be painstakingly attentive to adolescent female realities and their lives within the Church, disposed to intelligent understanding of the lives of adolescent females, reasonable in their judgement of the veracity of their understanding, and responsible in their enactment of their judgements. Most importantly, however, they must be mindful of the surprising movement of the Holy Spirit in the world and responsive to the requirements of love. I hope that my work will encourage further investigation into adolescent faith, sexuality, and experience. And I hope that ongoing work will facilitate adolescent female flourishing within the body of the faithful.

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